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THE RED PEARL

Readers' Digest Novel

THE LAST OF THE AVIERS

THE WHITE PALACE

THE LITTED PALACE

A ROMANCE OF THE LOST PALACE

THE LITTED PALACE

BY ELLIOTT CLIFFORD

EDITOR OF THE "LITTED PALACE"

NEW YORK

BRADLEY AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

100 NASSAU STREET

THE RED PRINCE;

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BY FREDERIC WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF THE "MUSTANG HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.

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BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF THE "MEXICAN ROMANCE," ETC., ETC.

BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS.

THE RED PRINCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST HUNTRESS.

A PARTY of men, on horse and mule-back, drew rein, about an hour before sunset, in the fall of 1865, in an open glade of the forest, by the banks of a rushing stream, in the heart of the Sierra Madre, close to the eastern border of the Mexican province of the Sonora. Around them was a wilderness of snowy peaks, the bases of the hills and most of the valleys being covered with dense woods. But, as far as the eye could see, besides their own selves, not a human creature was visible in all the landscape.

A few mountain-sheep gazed curiously down at the little party from the nearest precipices, and then tossed their heads in disdain, and bounded away to more inaccessible solitudes.

The travelers numbered some ten or twelve men, all told; the greater part being ordinary Mexicans and half-breed contrabandistas, or smugglers; but the leader of the band, from his white skin and general air of refinement, was evidently of a different race. His dress was military in cut, and much like that of a Confederate officer, the superior finish of his weapons—all American, of the latest pattern—confirming the supposition.

He was a man of middle age, fast growing gray, with a decidedly military air, and he was talking angrily to the only other white man of the party, a stout, black-bearded individual, in the ordinary dress of a Texan hunter or trapper, who had just ridden in to join the party, from a side deer-path in the forest.

The hunter bore over the bow of his saddle the half of a large mountain-sheep, and seemed to be excusing himself for some misdemeanor, from his apologetic air.

"I tell you, Mart, you had no business to leave her," said the gentleman, angrily; "I trusted my daughter to you, and

you have left her in some place or other, without bringing her back. It's well for you that the war's over, sir, or I'd have you bucked and gagged for disobeying my orders."

"Deed, Gin'ral, 'twarn't my fault," protested Martin Bradford, better known as "Mart, the Scout." "I begged Miss Lily to come back with me. I told her how awful mad you'd be ef I cum back without her; but gosh! Gin'ral, you know how 'tis yourself. Miss Lily she'd sot her mird on findin' her way alone; and finally she gallop off, and told me to ketch her ef I could. What war I to do, gin'ral? Little Joe, hyar," patting the neck of his compact little black mustang, as he spoke—"he ar a good little hoss, to be sure, but what c'u'd me or him do ag'in' that flyer o' Miss Lily's? Ef I'd 'a' chased her, she'd 'a' luffed at me, and gosh knows when I'd got back, to tell you, Gin'ral."

The General had been listening to the explanation with an air of great impatience and vexation. He gnawed his long grizzled moustache, and seemed to long to find fault with some one, while his sense of justice prevented his scolding the hunter further. He remained silent, looking at the ground for a full minute, and then burst out:

"It's my own fault, for spoiling that child as I have. I should never have let her go with you. She never shall, again, after to-night. Who knows what might happen to the foolish girl, all alone in this wilderness, with wild beasts and wilder Indians all round her? How far off did you leave her, Mart?"

"I didn't leave her at all, Gin'ral," said Mart, sulkily. "She leff me, jest as soon as I shot this hyar bighorn. That war 'bout a mile from hyar, up that path thar. She kin track, anyhow, Gin'ral, ez good ez nine fellers out o' ten, and she kin foller Little Joe's track like a mice. B'sides, she ar got the dog to help her. She'll be comin' in soon, never you fear, Gin'ral."

The General looked anxiously at the sinking sun, and said, in a tone that showed how uncomfortable he felt:

"Tha's not it, Mart. That's not it. Suppose she meets a grizzly, or suppose any of those Indians are lurking about? You ought to have followed her at *any* risk."

Mart flung down the quarters of the bighorn on the ground,

and turned his horse's head to the forest, with compressed lips.

"'Nuff said, Gin'ral," he said. "You shain't say that Mart Bradford tuk yer pay, and disobeyed yer orders. I'll fotch her back, ef I hev to shoot her hoss, or git shot myself."

The hunter dug his long spurs into the pony's sides with a vicious kick as he spoke; and Little Joe, considerably astonished at the ebullition of his master's temper, gave an angry snort, and bounded away as if some one had burned him.

The General looked relieved when he saw the hunter depart; and for the first time he turned to his Mexican followers, who had been sitting around on their horses and mules, lazily surveying the disputants.

"Go into camp, Jose," he said, in Spanish. "We won't find a better place in a hurry. Miguel, take my horse, and rub him down before you hobble him out."

"*Si, señor*," replied the half-breed muleteer addressed, and General Armistead dismounted from his horse, and stood meditatively by the banks of the stream, while the Mexicans unsaddled their pack-mules, and made preparations for camp.

While they are lighting the small fire of dry sticks, to make the least smoke possible, let us explain the circumstances under which this party had come there. General Armistead was a Virginian by birth, who, at the end of the civil war, found himself in Texas, nearly ruined; his whole worldly belongings consisting of two blood horses, a few very handsome rifles, pistols and swords (articles in which he had always been choice), a worn-out General's uniform, about a thousand dollars in gold—and his daughter, Lily.

The last article was the most precious of all to him, but also by far the most troublesome. Strict disciplinarian as the General was held to be in the service, there was one creature—his daughter—whom he never could quell, and who, on the contrary, ruled him with a rod of rushes, as potent as iron.

Lily Armistead was a wilful, spoiled, but entirely bewitching little lady, about four feet and a half in perpendicular altitude, who, at eighteen years of age, tyrannized over all beholders, and "could fool her father out of his eyes," as Mart

Bradford often asserted. The young lady had grown up without the fostering care of a mother, which might have corrected some of her wilful ways; but Mrs. Armistead had died when her daughter was but three years old, and since that the girl had been most unmitigatedly spoiled by every one.

Her naturally keen intellect had spurred her on to a considerable amount of self-education, but her pastimes were decidedly boydenish. Lily Armistead could ride like Diana Vernon, or like a fox-hunter, on occasion, with or without saddle or bridle. She could beat Mart Bradford, her instructor, with the rifle, and her pistol-shooting was simply extraordinary. But these, and lassoing wild cattle, were her only amusements, and she was perfectly innocent of all capacity as seamstress, pianist, etc.

To this wild girl, growing up all untamed in a Texan ranche, came the news of the ruin of her father, almost as a jest.

"What need we care, papa?" she said, when the poor General told her of his scanty remaining possessions, and of the poverty before them. "The war's ruined us one way; but it's left us free another. Now we can leave Texas, and travel all over. I'm tired of this old ranche, anyway, and I tell you what we'll do. We'll cross the border, and go prospecting for mines in Mexico, and dig a lot of gold, and come back rich. Maybe we'll find Moctezuma's treasures, if we have luck. You know the Indians say that they are buried in a lake, hidden away in the midst of the Sierra Madre, where they were thrown when Cortes conquered Mexico. Let's go, papa, as soon as ever we can."

The poor General had but little faith in the expedition after Moctezuma's treasures, but he had friends, merchants in the city of Ures, in Sonora, who had promised him plenty of employment if he came to them with a stock in trade however small. So that he pretended to yield to his daughter's visionary scheme; and set forth, with his little capital invested in goods for the Sonora market, taking a generally unknown and reputedly dangerous route through the Sierra Madre, in company with some Mexican smugglers.

Lily was off hunting almost every day on the road, mounted on her swift thoroughbred, and pioneered by Mart Bradford.

This was the first time, however, that she had deserted the lantern, and gone off "on her own hook," and her father was proportionally anxious about her.

He stood looking at the stream, brooding over the girl's wilful folly, and trying to make up his mind to scold her when she came back. But as the sun sunk slowly to the west, the anxious father forgot all his vexation at Lily, in the keenest terror lest something had befallen her; for minutes passed into hours, and it was growing dark, and still no signs were seen of the lost huntress.

General Armistead could stand it no longer.

"Saddle the horse, Jose," he said to his groom. "I will go after her myself. Keep the camp, all of you, and if you hear a shot, shout all together."

The old soldier swung himself on his horse, and rode off up the same path that Murt Bradford had taken, at a sharp canter, his eyes fixed on the tracks in the muddy way.

CHAPTER II.

LILY'S ADVENTURE.

NOT ten minutes after General Armistead had ridden away, the quick, light tramp of a high-bred horse, stepping daintily and proudly, as is the wont of his race, echoed along the bare rocks of the Sierra Madre, just above the edge of the belt of timber that clothed the lower spurs of the hills.

A young girl, tiny and trim in figure, with a profusion of short, golden curls clustering all round her head, rode out of the dry bed of a mountain torrent, and looked down a sheer precipice of some two hundred feet, into the very valley where the General's *vaqueros* were making their camp. The young girl was very pretty, despite an exceedingly snaky and independent look in the nose, the end of which was just a trifle notched, not to say turned up. But her blue eyes were so wonderfully bright and sparkling, her little red mouth so arch and merry looking, that no one who saw Lily Armistead could

help wanting to pet and indulge such a merry little sprite to any extent, reasonable or unreasonable.

Lily rode a splendid young thoroughbred four year old colt, and rode him as few girls could. Her equipments had cost a great deal of money before her father's ruin, and were exceedingly handsome. That English sidesaddle, with the double crutch, had been imported expressly for her, in a most expensive manner, when gold was at a tremendous premium, and was furnished with military holsters, and a capacious pouch on the off-side, which contained all of Lily's worldly wealth. The little girl looked uncommonly *poignée* in her brown riding-habit, short and close, laced across the breast, hussar fashion. Lily affected military airs, from the jaunty little bicorne cap, set on one side of her sunny curls, to the gilt spurs on her Polish boots; and carried at her back a light B.M. rifle, made on purpose for her, which she could use like a veteran.

The sunny girl laughed gayly, as she looked down the valley and beheld the little group of mulattoes. Mart Bramford was not to be seen near them.

"Ah! Mart," she cried aloud. "You thought I should have to follow your old trail, did you? Thought no one but you could find the camp. I've got here first, after all; though goodness knows how I'm going to ride down these rocks. I'm afraid Firefly can't go down them. We must find an easier place. But where's father? He ought to be there, but I don't see him."

She put her hand to the saddle pouch, and quickly produced a field-glass, with which she scanned the group, and the fire, keenly.

"He's not there," said the girl, a little more soberly, as she put down the glass. "Where can he be? There's Jose and Miguel, and the rest, all taking their supper, but no father, and no Mart. I wonder if I have frightened them. Perhaps they've gone to look for me. Now what fun it would be, if I could get down there quietly, and frighten those cowardly Mexicans; and laugh at papa and Mart when they come in, and find me all comfortable."

The girl's face lighted up with glee at the thought, for Lily Armistead was a born tease. She reined back her horse from the precipice, and dismounted, after which she crept forward

to the edge of the rocks, and peeped over again to take a fresh survey.

The heights on which she stood went sheer down, without a break, into the valley, the stream washing their base in places, and then winding off again into the forest. About a mile off on either side, the valley ended in slopes, that slowly mounted alongside this wall of rock, the river turning thence to the eastward, and hastening to the plain. On the other side of the stream was the forest, which spread out for many miles here and there broken by glades, and streams, and white, meandering deer-paths.

Lily scanned the forest with great attention, to see if there were any traces of Mart or her father. Presently she laughed.

"There he is, the silly old dear!" she exclaimed, half reproachfully, as she caught sight of her father's gray coat in a broad glade. She looked earnestly through the glass, and could see that the General was riding slowly along, his head bent, as if searching for something on the ground.

"Papa, dear papa!" exclaimed the mad-cap girl, with real penitence. "He's frightened, and he's trying to track me. I must stop him. I'll fire a shot. He must hear me, and he'll run back. As for Mart, he deserves to have a hunt, for taking me at my word."

The girl rapidly unslung her light rifle as she spoke, and cocked the piece. She was just going to fire, when she happened to cast her eyes toward the head of the valley, in the expectation of seeing Mart on the trail by which she had come. No sooner had she done so than, as quick as thought, she dropped on the earth, quite flat, and lay there without moving a muscle.

Down the dry bed of another torrent, which in winter must have tumbled into the stream below, a long file of Indians were slowly riding, their shields hanging at their naked backs, the scarlet plumes on their lances glowing like fire in the light of the setting sun. Most of them had short brass-mounted carbines at their saddle bows, and several brass *estoppeaux* or blunderbusses were visible.

Lily lay as still as a mouse, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement, but without showing the fear that might have been expected. Her lips kept moving, as she murmured to herself.

"Ain't this fun, just? Real live Indians close by, and they can't see me! How lucky old Firefly's hid behind these rocks! Wouldn't you like to catch Lily, Mr. Indian? Yes, with the owl's feathers in your hair. Ugh! How ugly you are! Wouldn't it be fun, if I just took that fellow in the middle of the owl's face he's got painted on his breast; the hideous-looking creature! But 'twon't do, Lil. You've got to keep 'kinder mum,' as Mart says, or they'll catch you, my girl. Whew! What a lot of them! Guess that must be a general muster of all the tribes. Well, one comfort, they can't catch papa or me. We can outrun the best horses they've got, and give them two yards to one. My! don't I wish I could fire just one little shot! I do hate an Indian too! Mart says they're all devils, and I believe him."

The Indians rode steadily on without observing Lily. She had come down by another ravine, in which her horse still stood, and was completely sheltered from view by some scattered boulders, from behind one of which her blue eyes peeped through a bush at the savages. The red-men were very numerous. Lily counted over a hundred, and they kept coming so fast that she had to give up the job.

They rode quietly, at a foot pace, and their road took them down to the valley where the General's servants were unsuspectingly encamped. Lily saw all this in a moment, and was puzzled and alarmed at their position. Had she seen her father there, she would have fired a shot at any hazard to alarm the party and warn them of the danger, but she could see, by turning her head, that the General was far away in the forest, and that his path led him away in a circuit around by the way she had come.

The girl had crossed the very ravine by which the war-party was descending, not twenty minutes before, but much higher up, and only the circumstance of there being hard rock under foot prevented the Indians from scenting her track.

While she lay thus, anxiously watching the Indians, Lily heard a low whine behind her. The stout-hearted girl turned pale for one moment and her heart beat loudly, as a great tawny bloodhound, with black muzzle, came rearing out from the ravine behind her, and began to lick her hands and face.

"Down, Jeff, down!" she muttered, in a fierce whisper.
"Lie down, sir!"

And the obedient animal crouched submissively down behind the boulder, while Lily, hardly daring to breathe, looked apprehensively at the Indians, to see if they had observed the dog's passage.

But the men of the war-party were apparently intent on the path before them, and kept on their winding way down toward the valley, without noticing any thing on their right hand. To this circumstance, and to the providential screen of a few low bushes, the girl owed her safety so far, for the warriors were not a hundred yards from her, in a straight line.

The old dog, Jefferson by name, snuffed the scent of the Indians with marks of disgust, and uttered a low, uneasy whine, which was stifled by his mistress' hand.

"Quiet, Jeff!" whispered Lily. "Do you want to ruin us, you stupid dog? Quiet, sir!"

She wondered that the Indians had not caught sight of the party in the valley before this. She did not know that the ravine in which they were, from its winding nature, precluded a view of the valley except at its entrance therein, some distance below. She lay watching the moving figures appear and disappear for several minutes more, till the last man had passed when she uttered a sigh of relief. Then she peered over the edge of the precipice into the valley, and scanned the forest paths below in search of her father. It was already too dark to see any thing but the valley, and the little camp fire.

The sun had set, and darkness came on so rapidly that not a thing could be seen in five minutes more, except the fire and the figures round it. And still there was no sign of the Indians, although the girl felt convinced that they must have seen the Mexicans long ere this.

"Now here you've got yourself into a pretty scrape, Miss Lily," said she to herself, as the darkness closed in. "Out alone on the mountain, with nothing for Firefly to eat, and papa wandering in the wilderness trying to find you. One comfort: the Indians can't catch *him*, whatever they may do to poor Jose. I wonder they don't make more noise down there. Hush, Jeff! Quiet, sir!"

The last words were addressed to the dog, which was whining again, but in a different tone of voice. Lily grasped his muzzle with her little hands, but the animal continued his smothered whine, and the girl realized that something must be near.

Instantly she drew back from the edge of the cliff, and stole back to her horse, rifle in hand. Firefly stood perfectly still as he had been trained to do, and Lily listened intently.

Old Jeff had ceased his whining now. The dog seemed to realize that he was on duty, and stood by his mistress, with his ears pricked up, waiting further developments. The white crescent of the new moon hung just above the dull crimson flush of the departed sunset, and cast a faint, ghostly light on the trio. Every now and then a faint breath of wind came softly down the ravine, and every time it came the old blood-hound uttered a low whine. It was evident that he caught the scent of some one up the ravine, and Lily cocked her rifle, expectant at least of a bear or wolf.

But as she still listened, it struck her that the tones of the dog's voice were by no means hostile, and she jumped to the conclusion that it must be Mart Bradford. For Lily Arnold, to think was to act, and without waiting another moment, the heedless girl called out in a low tone :

"Mart ! Is that you ?"

There was no answer for a minute, but Jeff gave a low growl. Lily placed her hand on Firefly's neck and climbed into her saddle without any more hesitation. She turned the horse's head up the ravine, and called out a second time.

"Mart Bradford, stop your fooling, and come out here, I say. There are Indians down in the valley, and papa's away."

The next minute she heard the click of a horse's hoofs, and the dark figure of a horseman rode out into the ravine above her, outlined against the starlit sky. Lily went forward to meet him, saying in a low, excited voice :

"Why didn't you answer before, Mart ? You ought to be ashamed."

Then she started back in her saddle in sudden alarm, as the horseman put his hand on her bridle, and said in a low tone :

"Hush, girl ! I am no Mart Bradford. Be silent, for your life."

CHAPTER III.

A. STRANGE MEETING.

For one instant Lily Armistead quailed, at the sight of a stranger, so close to her, and in such a place. The next, she pointed her light rifle straight at his heart, and sternly said :

"Let go my bridle, or I fire!"

The stranger laughed in a low tone.

"What for, my foolish girl?" he asked. "I'm not going to hurt you. You are out here alone. Indians are close to you, of the most merciless kind, and you call out as if you were at home. I saw you, half an hour ago, and I wonder *they* didn't."

Lily was surprised at the tones of his voice. They were those of a man of education. She could only see, in the darkness, a pale face, with a dark moustache, surmounted by a broad shadowy hat. Instinctively she realized that this man was not necessarily an enemy, and lowered her rifle.

"Well then," she said, a little pettishly, "let go my bridle. Who are you, anyway?"

"Never mind just now," said the stranger in a low voice. "You say there are Indians in the valley. Hold my horse a minute, while I creep down and reconnoiter."

Without waiting for an answer, he swung himself off his horse and threw the bridle to Lily, with a matter of fact air that flustered the young lady considerably.

"Well, I'm sure!" said Lily, angrily. "What do you take me for, sir? Hold your horse, indeed! I'm not a groom."

The stranger turned round in the darkness, and addressed her in a grave tone :

"Young lady," he said, "this is no time for ceremony. Your life depends on silence now. If, as you say, your father is away, he may return any moment, and be captured by those Indians there. I don't like their silence at all. Stand on tiptoe, and you will be sorry for it. Please to take my bridle."

How it came about Lily never knew, but the next moment the stranger was gone; and she found her self leaning his charger, as submissively as if she was used to it. All stood silently by. He had snuffed at the stranger when he dismounted, and seemed to make up his mind that it was all right, for he whined no more.

The stranger disappeared into the darkness, and Lily watched for some time in vain. Between him and her was a gulf of blackness, uninterrupted to the edge of the precipice below. The outline of this was clearly marked by the faint red glow of the fire in the valley, against which it stood out in relief.

Presently the girl saw the head of the stranger put out over the edge of the rocks, where it remained for some minutes. In the valley all was still silent, and Lily began to wonder at it. Suddenly, after the stranger had watched for some minutes, she heard a single voice, far below, heard in a tone of terror:

"Los Indios! Los Indios!"

The cry was almost instantly checked, as if the utterer had been stifled, and there was a confused scuffling sound faintly heard for a few minutes. The unknown man lay perfectly still during the whole scuffle, and for some minutes after, when all was still. Then he slowly and cautiously withdrew, and Lily heard not a sound more, till he suddenly made his appearance again, close to her side, as silently as a ghost.

"What is it?" whispered the girl, anxiously.

"Your men are all captured," said the man, in a low voice. "The Indians sneaked up on foot, and beset the whole party."

"Did they kill them?" asked Lily, awe-struck.

"No," said the stranger; "they are out on their new-moon raid after slaves and cattle, I think; and those Mexicans are not worth killing, the Apaches think. But the poor fellows had better be dead."

As he spoke, he mounted his horse, and turned to Lily.

"Young lady," he said, "how you came here I don't know; but one thing is certain—I can not leave you till I have found your friends. I saw you cross the Indian trail long before you knew it, and I made up my mind that you

must be crazy. How came you to leave your party? You have got yourself into a pretty scrape."

"So I begin to think, sir," said Lily, frankly. "I ran away from Matt Bradford, who was put in charge of me by papa, and tried to find a new path to our camp; but it's lucky that I did, now that this has happened, or we might all have been killed."

"Who is your father?" demanded the man, abruptly. "How comes he out here with a wild child like you?"

Lily paled instinctively, although her pretty little grimace lost all its attractiveness in the darkness.

"My father is General Frank Armistead," she said, proudly; "and I think you're very impudent to call me a child, whoever you are. So there, now!"

The stranger took no notice of her pettish tone, but asked:

"What Armistead's that? Armistead of Texas, formerly of Virginia? One of Smith's division leaders?"

"Yes, sir," said Lily, proudly. "And now, who are you that asks such questions of me?"

"Miss Armistead," said the stranger, gravely, "I knew your father well before the war, though we fought on opposite sides; and I have carried you in my arms when you wore much lozier clothes than you do now. Did you never hear him speak of your cousin, Harry Randolph? I was your mother's second cousin."

"Why didn't you say so before, then?" asked Lily, as unreasonable as ever. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Harry, to come on me in the dark, frightening me out of my life! Now you must help me to find papa, if ever you hope to be forgiven. Do you hear, sir?"

Randolph uttered a low laugh.

"Hush, child!" he said; "you seem to forget where you are, and who are near us. I've heard you were a spoilt child, Miss Lily, but I thought you had some sense. Be quiet. Don't talk so loud!"

"Well, I won't, then," said Lily, in a lower tone. "But tell me, Harry, how did you manage to drop in here, just in the nick of time? I've heard papa speak of you very often, but who would have ever dreamed of meeting you out here, good-

ness only knows where? How *did* you come here, anyway?"

"I'll tell you presently," said Randolph; "but, just now, we must get out of here to a safe place. Follow me, and in the morning we'll find the General, if he's above ground. The Indians have gone into camp down there, but our horses are so hungry that they may neigh out and discover us. Come."

He led the way up the dry torrent-bed, at a slow pace, taking great care to step in the sand as much as possible, till they were out of hearing from the valley. Then he turned abruptly round to the left as if he was well acquainted with the way, and rode up a cleft in the rocks, the product of some volcanic convulsion in former times, where the horse-hoofs echoed on a bed of solid rock. Lily followed without hesitation. Ignorant of the world as the child was, there was nothing astonishing to her in this meeting, in the heart of the Serra Madre, with a cousin she had not seen since she was a baby. It was only "such fun."

Randolph was very silent, till they had ridden some distance. Then he turned round and observed:

"Now we can talk, but not too loud. We are in the cleft which comes out on the other side of the mountain, and we shall soon reach my fortress. In two minutes more we shall pass Lookout Rock, and you can see the valley and forest in safety."

"What do you mean by your fortress?" asked Lily, glad of the permission to chatter again. "You're a very funny man, cousin Harry. One would think you lived here, if one didn't know it was impossible."

"I *do* live here," said Randolph, quietly. "That is to say, I have camped here for several weeks, along with Mock."

"Mock! Who's Mock?" demanded Lily, perthy; "your dog, or your friend?"

"My friend for the present," said Randolph, laughing. "His full name is nothing less than Mockmuck, and he claims to be descended from that gentleman. But here we are by Lookout Rock. Now you shall see what you shall see."

As he spoke, the cleft in the rocks suddenly widened. Before it had resembled nothing so much as a small cañon, the sides being sheer precipices of basalt, the bottom not over ten feet wide. Now, one of the sides ended abruptly, and they found before them only a broad ledge on the mountain-side, the light crescent moon just sinking in the mists over the end of it.

But at the end of the cañon, and before the ledge commenced, a broad platform of rock jutted out over a black gulf; and the glimmer of water far below evinced that they were looking out over the lower country.

Randolph stole round the edge of the outer cliff, and pointed backward to the left of the path they had just traveled. Lily could see the mountain-side sloping downward, to end in an abrupt precipice, and the glimmer of several fires revealed to her the presence of the Indian war-party in the valley. Randolph took out a long telescope, with which he scanned the fires carefully.

"All right," he said, presently, shutting it up; "they're going to sleep, and the General's not come back. Now if I only knew where he was, I should feel very much relieved."

"He's out in the black forest, hunting for me," said Lily, penitently. "And so's poor Mart. Goodness knows what they'll do, if they don't find me."

"You should have thought of that before you started," said her cousin, gravely. "Still, every thing may be for the best. If they had been down there they might have been killed before this. Those Apaches love white scalps."

"But where can they be?" asked Lily.

"On your track, child," said Randolph. "If Mart Bradford is the same young fellow who used to teach me turkey-bunting when I was a school-boy, he hasn't forgotten how to follow a trail. They're safe enough, if they only went together. They'll camp out on the track till morning and follow us up here."

"But, won't the Indians do the same, cousin Harry?" asked Lily. "That wouldn't be so nice, would it?"

"They won't do it, child," said Randolph. "I watched them from the top of the rocks, when they went down the ravine. Your trail was quite invisible when it crossed there. More by good-luck than good guidance, though Miss Lily. It

was careless enough everywhere else, but the hard rock saved you there. Those fellows are on their way to Durango and Culiacan, and they won't turn aside for a single trail. They always start out with the new moon, so as to have plenty of light to drive their cattle home. But, see there. If I mistake not, there's your father, and perhaps Mart. No one else would light a fire out there."

He pointed to a faint-glimmering light in the woods, several miles away, apparently, though it was difficult to estimate distances in the darkness. The light increased in size for several minutes, when it again sank away, and presently was gradually hidden, at first partially, finally altogether from sight.

"That's a hunter's fire," said Henry Randolph; "and he's screened it with bushes to hide it from view. If that's the General's fire it's equally certain that Mart Bradford's there, too, for I don't suppose your father is enough of a woodsman to hide his fire. Come, cousin Lily, we may as well be off now. I suppose you're hungry, and Mock has supper ready for all of us."

Lily turned away, more reassured than she had been for the whole evening. She doubted not that her father and Mart had escaped the Indians, and camped out alone; and her romantic and excitement-loving nature was delighted with the strangeness of her adventure, now that her father was safe.

"Say, cousin Hal, isn't it fun?" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "There are those horrid Indians down there in the valley, and we're all of us safe and out of their reach, and they can't catch us, and it'll be ever so much better fun, living in these mountains and hunting, than going to that stupid Sonora."

"Were you going to Sonora?" asked Randolph, as they rode off along the ledge, in company, to the westward.

"Yes; and if it wasn't wicked, I'd say I was glad we can't go any farther. I hate trading. Fancy poor papa trading pack peddler, to sell cotton prints to those yellow Mexicans! I wish he'd turn fillibuster instead, and fight them, that's what I wish. There's something romantic in that, and then we might stumble on Moctezuma's treasure, up in these mountains, somewhere. Wouldn't that be fun, just?"

Her companion started, and looked at her in the faint starlight.

"What do *you* know about Moctezuma's treasures?" he asked.

"Oh! nothing," she answered, gayly. "No one will ever find them, I suppose, but wouldn't it be fun if we could! Wouldn't I cut a figure all over Europe! I'd go to all the operas and balls—I never was at a ball, cousin—isn't it a shame—and I'd—oh, my! I don't know *what* I wouldn't do!"

Randolph laughed.

"In the mean time," he said, "here we are, home. Miss Lily Armistead, allow me to welcome you to Randolph's Den, as I call it."

And he turned to the right, round a jutting cliff, and rode straight into a cavern, to all appearance as black as pitch. Far away in the darkness glimmered a little red light, and Lily followed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROKEN CIRCLE.

WITH the first gray gleam of dawn, a man unrolled himself from the blanket in which he had been sleeping, by the dead embers of a little fire in the forest, and stood up on his feet, stretching himself. The man was none other than Mart Proffert, and close to his feet lay the still recumbent form of General Armistead, sleeping heavily, with an expression of suffering on his rugged face, even in slumber, painful to see.

Mart looked down at the sleeper sorrowfully.

"Poor Gin'ral!" said the hunter. "Ef 'twarn't Miss Lily as did it, I'd say 'cuss her, for a troublesome varmint, to give her dad so much trouble! Dad rot my skin! Ef we don't find her soon, Gin'ral 'll go clean crazy. Never seen a man take on so as he did last night, when he seen my fire, and didn't find the gal hyar. Gosh! 'Twon't do to give up this yer trail till we find her, ef we have to starve while we does it."

While the hunter spoke, he was carefully folding his blanket and rolling it up. The fire was made at the edge of the little glade in the forest, close to a pool, at which the deer evidently came to drink, from the hoof marks all round. Two horses, one the General's sorrel thoroughbred, the other that black Joe, were feeding on bunches of cut grass, placed before them, slowly and daintily, as if they had enough already. Both were secured to trees.

Mart Bradford placed the roll of blanket on the cantle of the saddle on which his head had been pillowed, and secured it with the buckskin thongs. Then, picking up his rifle, he walked across the little glade and up one of the deer paths for some distance, as if in search of something among the tracks.

As the light strengthened every moment, he soon found what he sought—the hoof-marks of Lily Annister's thoroughbred. They were easily found, for Mart had left them in that very place at dark, the night before; and the print of a horse-shoe is too rare in the wilderness to be mistaken. The tracks led straight through the woods to the base of the mountain beyond, and Mart resolved to wake the General, and follow the track at once.

"Mebbe she arn't far off," he muttered, as he strode back. "Ef 'twarn't that Injuns nou't be about, I'd 'a made a big fire to tell her whar we was, but thar's no tellin' when we nou't fall ontoer them thievin' 'Pash or Conanche, out on thar earned raids to Chihuahua. She's up in that thar mountain, ef she's anywhar."

He concluded loud to attract the General's attention, and the old warrior started out of his sleep in an instant, with the wide-awake look that a soldier soon acquires, after a little picket-duty.

"Well, Mart, well?" he said, as he jumped up. "Did you find the tracks s ill there, or had you mistaken?"

"Trail's plain, Gin'ral, plain as the nose on yer face. She are gone up that thar mountain; and mebbe she are gone down again, back to the very valley whar our General's in a camp'n. Shouldn't wonder. Wimmen is contrary critters, and gals most of all."

The General went on saddling his horse while the hunt-

ter was speaking, and Mart Bradford was busily engaged all the time in securing the girth strap of his deep Texan saddle on the little mustang's side. Without breaking their fast—and it is not likely they had nothing wherewithal to do it—the two men rode off toward the mountain, up the deep path, following the tracks of Lilly's horse.

They were plain and easy to follow, the print of the iron shoe and nail's needing only a glance to distinguish them, among the deer-tracks. The path through the woods was as clear and well-defined, from the passage of wild animals for centuries, as an ordinary foot-path in a settlement. It ran here and there among the trees in a tortuous course, but the general direction was undoubtedly toward the mountain, and thither the two trackers followed it.

At last the ground began to rise, and the deer tracks divided, spreading to right and left along the base of the mountain.

But the horse-shoe mark was quite plain still, climbing the mountain side; and the General rode eagerly after it, outstripping Mart Bradford in his eagerness. Pretty soon the trees began to grow thin, and the bare rocks to crop out here and there. At last an abrupt precipice, about twenty feet high, resembling the gigantic steps of a stairway, barred their farther progress, and the tracks of the horse turned to the left along its base. This ledge or wall disappeared in a slope several hundred yards farther on, the slope being the other side of the hill which formed the boundary of the valley in which the General had made his camp the evening before.

The ground at the foot of this ledge was quite soft, and the horse tracks were plainer than ever, but when they came to the end of the great step, they disappeared, and the General paused in disappointment.

Mart Bradford came up alongside and took the search into his own charge.

"See yer, Gin'ral," he said. "Yer see that o' one side there are bar' rocks, and o' 'other soft earth. There are no tracks o' the earth, 'cause why, the hoofs are gone off o' the rocks. That's a little speck o' dirt yonder, whar 'twas shuk from his hoofs, and thar's a little scrape whar the shoe struck fire. Now, one thing's plain. If the beast went over this

yer rock, he kin only ha' gone up thar, through that cañon. So thar's whar we got to go."

He pointed to the right as he spoke. Above them was a slope of bare rocks ending in precipices or rugged ascents, except in one place, where a small fissure, or cañon, offered an easy path. It was plainly the only practicable place for a horse to pass, and as they rode toward it they were convinced that Lily had passed that way by finding, in the little sprinkles of sand that had settled in the midst of the cañon, the frequent print of the small horse-shoe.

The cañon was a continuation of the same fissure that Lily and Randolph had gone up the evening before. It ran all round the mountain in an irregular ring, crossing the numerous gullies and torrent-beds that scamed the rocks from the summit downward.

As soon as they had entered it Mart Bradford addressed the General.

"See hyar, Gin'ral," said the scout; "this hyar track hev got ter be follered keerful like, and ef yer don't stay abint me, we'll git the tracks mused up. Ef't are all the same ter you, I'll go ahead a-fut, and call yer when I find any thing."

"Very well, Mart," said the General, with a sigh; "you know best, my good fellow; but be careful and quick, for God's sake. I am on the rack til she is found."

"You bet, Gin'ral," was the laconic reply; and the hunter leaped off his horse and followed the track on foot, swiftly and carefully, guided by an occasional mark, here and there.

In the center of the cañon, as we have said, was a little rivulet of sand, formed by the gradual attrition of many winter rains, and every now and then Lily's horse appeared to have stepped into it. In this way the scout tracked her along for near a quarter of a mile, till a broad gully interrupted the cañon, which it crossed at right angles. Here the track had been washed bare, and left no tracks for some distance up the gully. *But*, however, there was a bank of sand, caused by a ledge of rock, against which the sides of the gully had lodged. It was some six feet broad, and extended all across the gully.

No sooner did Mart's eyes rove to this, than he stopped as if he had been shot, and hurriedly exclaimed, in a low tone:

"Injuns; by Gosh!"

Through the center of this ribbon of sand ran a deep and well-defined track, as of many horse-hoofs, all fresh.

Mart's instinctive action was to cock his rifle and gaze apprehensively up and down the gully; but nothing was in sight but rugged walls of rock, and he breathed more freely.

General Armistead saw the action and the tracks at the same minute, and asked:

"What's the matter, Mart?"

The scout made no answer but a sign for silence, till he had carefully inspected the tracks, when he came back to the General's side and said, in a low tone:

"That's a hell-bad of Injans down in that ar valley, Gin'-ral, and the Lord only knows ef they hain't got Miss Lily."

The General turned as pale as ashes and trembled.

"How do you know, Mart?" he faltered.

"That's the tracks," said the scout, pointing; "they passed last night, and that gully leads into the valley. This are a regular road for the 'Pach to go to Chihuahua. I've heern tell on it many's the time."

"But Lily may not be in the valley," said the agonized father; "surely she would have fired a shot during the night, when she knew we were out searching for her; and we heard nothing, Mart."

"That's what ar the question," said Mart; "she mo't and she mo't not. Ef she went down the gully, she's ben tak. Ef she went on, she's safe, I guess; for the trail don't come into this hyar cañon. We must go on acrost and see whar she went."

"But may not this track be an old one, Mart?" persisted the poor General, clinging to any shred of hope. "May they not have passed yesterday morning?"

"No," said the scout, decidedly; "them tracks were made last night. That I'll swear to. 'Twar after dark, for the rocks is all damp yet, and ef it had 'a' ben in the day they would be dry kinder loose and crumbly, on the dry rock. No, Gin'-ral, that's no use a-feelin'. The 'Pach hev got 'em, I reckon, but Lord knows ef Miss Lily's down thar or not. That cañon thar'll tell us, darned quick."

And he pointed, as he spoke, to the continuation of the ca-

rious, encircling fissure that continued its way around the mountain on the opposite side of the gully.

"Let us go then, Mart," said the General, anxiously; "my poor child! Where can she be?"

Mart led the way across the gully into the cañon, and looked eagerly ahead for tracks. But for some distance from the gully there was no sand in the middle of the cañon. All the *debris* had been washed down close to the lower wall, from the fact of the ground sloping in that direction, and it was some distance ahead before they recognized the white ribbon of sand again. Mart caught sight of it first and was running forward toward it, when he suddenly stopped and listened.

A sound had caught his ear that he knew well, the rolling of stones down the torrent-bed they had just left. As quick as thought he sprung to his horse and hurriedly whispered:

"Stand still fur yer life. More on 'em."

The General instinctively reined up, and listened. The sound of rolling stones increased and was followed by the tramp of many horses' feet coming down the gully they had crossed. Mart Bradford cast a quick glance backward.

They were still in full sight from the gully, and he felt sure that they could not escape being seen, if, as he thought, more Indians were coming. As a desperate resource he rode close up against the upper wall of the cañon, where he was partially hidden by the projections of the rough rocks, and the General followed his example.

Then the two silently awaited their fate.

Presently a horseman appeared in sight, crossing the head of the cañon, his horse going down the gully. Mart laid down his rifle, expecting to be discovered, but the horseman passed on and disappeared.

"Heavens! Mart," whispered the General, "that was a *white man*!"

Mart only made an impatient signal for silence. The first horseman had undoubtedly been a white man dressed as a hunter. He was followed, almost immediately, by a line of others, some dressed as Mexicans, some as hunters, some as Indians, but all apparently intent on their purpose down the gully, for they went on at a rapid walk, looking neither to right nor left.

The two Texans watched them anxiously, and began to think that they were going to escape unseen, when an unfavorable circumstance revealed them in a moment. The General's horse, a splendid thoroughbred stallion, suddenly reared a head meeting to the passing horses, and the sound of hoofs hurrying out of his mouth when the passing file looked, and a dozen horsemen dashed into the cañon at full speed, shouting all together in several languages—a confusion of fierce cries.

"Up and go!" yelled Mart Bradford, whirling round like a top, and dashing in his spurs. The General, with a fierce oath at his horse, followed his example, and away went the two horsemen up the cañon, followed by the strangers, in a headlong race for life.

White or red, the character of the pursuers was clearly evinced as hostile in the first few bounds, for the sound of their angry yell was mingled with the cracking of rifles and pistols, and the bullets went clapping up against the rocks all round the fugitives as they fled.

The Texans had a start of near two hundred yards, and the rocky valley was entirely harmless; but it became plain that the enemy was determined on their capture, for every moment the sound of hoofs behind increased, as if fresh pursuers were coming after.

Lily Joe bounded gallantly along, his ears laid back and his body straightened out, while the tall thoroughbred charger had to be restrained with the bit to keep him along-side. The General was bound not to leave his companion.

The pursuers did not gain a foot; on the contrary they were being gored, when the cañon was again interrupted by the sudden gully, down which Lily had ridden the previous night. The General's stallion, instead of keeping on across the gully, made one of those sudden bolts so hard to follow down the course of the torrent bed, and before his rider could pull him up, he was many feet down the gully, while Lily Joe, more obedient to his heavier bit, kept on up the cañon.

General Armstrong found himself alone in the gully when he pulled up; but the sound of his pursuers above warned him that there was no time to rejoin Mart Bradford. Trust-

ing to back, he dashed off down the torrent-bed, only to find himself checked at the edge of the precipice below. He looked into the valley, and it was full of Indians, just receiving their horses, and looking up the mountainside for the cause of the unusual clamor.

A dozen puffs of smoke and the whistle of bullets told him that he was discovered, when his first pursuers came tearing down the gully after him, shouting and firing.

There was but one way of escape.

By riding along the top of the precipice, over a frightfully dangerous ridge, he could regain the same gully down which his pursuers had come in the first instance, and he could see that it was now empty.

With a shout of defiance, he spurred his charger, and dashed up the side of the ridge, followed by his enemies, who had come quite close during the involuntary pause he made at the edge of the precipice. Bullets whistled round him, fired from the valley below and the pursuers behind, but in the hurry and confusion he was still unhurt. He gained the crest of the dividing ridge, and saw before him a steep bank of rocks and sand, down which he dashed headlong into the gully, his horse escaping a fall only by a miracle, it seemed.

Then he turned up the gully to regain the cañon he had left, and beheld a crowd of Indians and Mexicans, waiting above him. Desperately resolved to sell his life dearly or escape, the General turned his horse down the gully, and drew a revolver. **It was his best chance.**

Going down at full speed, there was a bare chance that he might dash through the Indians below by the swift rush of his thoroughbred racer. At all events, he instinctively turned there, and clattered down the gully like a whirlwind.

He heard a confused shouting overhead, from the edge of the rocks, and then, as he swept around a curve of the torrent bed, there was the green valley before him, and the Indians crowding to receive him.

With a wild yell, the old soldier charged down into the midst of them, firing right and left; and the next moment was plucked from his saddle, and rolled helpless on the grass, at the end of the ever-ready lance of one of the Apaches, while a second horse stopped the career of his enemy.

CHAPTER V.

MART BRADFORD'S TRIALS.

WHEN Mart Bradford saw the General's horse make its last bolt, he realized that the latter was lost, but had no time to help him. He only dug the spurs into Little Joe, and checked him from following the three-colored with the ugly Mexican gag-bit.

"If you'd had one o' these, Gin'ral," muttered the scout, "instead o' that trampy little snaffle, you might 'a got off. But in the mornings it's every feller for himself, and the devil take the hindmost, special when 'Pash and rannycodes is round."

And the hunter turned in his saddle as he fled up the cañon, and saw that only three men were following him, the rest having gone down the gully after the more certain prize.

The stout-hearted scout moderated his horse's pace, and coolly calculated his chances of disposing of these three foes. Mart Bradford, with all his caution, was as brave as a lion, at need. His pursuers were an Indian and two Mexicans, to judge from their dress, and carried firearms, one of which was a brass *escopeta* or blunderbuss.

Mart moderated his pace and looked to his weapons, allowing his enemies to come up with him; but just in proportion as he slackened his pace the pursuers followed his example. It is one thing to hunt a hare; another to bring a bear to bay; and the sight of the scout, bringing his little mustang to a slow canter, and examining his rifle, did not appear to give his pursuers much satisfaction.

Seeing this, Mart galloped briskly on, till the cañon ended in the broad lake on which Lily had taken the night before, when the sound of shots, out in the valley below, announced to him the fall of the General. The hunter cut a quick glance forward down the lake. It appeared to him to end a little farther on, and Mart thought that he was brought to bay. Instantly he pulled up, sprung to the ground, and

leveled his rifle across Little Joe's back, at the advancing strangers.

At that sight, all three pulled up, as if they had been shot, and threw themselves off their horses, in imitation of Mart's maneuver. But the Mexican with the *escopeta* was not quick enough. The crack of the hunter's rifle was followed by a howl from the enemy, and the man dropped to the ground, and lay groaning.

Crack! crack! came two answering replies; and Mart uttered a deep curse of anger, as Little Joe trembled and dropped dead in front of him, shot through the brain.

"Dern your hides! You shall pay for that!" muttered the hunter, as he hastily crammed a fresh cartridge into the chamber of the Sharp's rifle he carried. It was Mart's favorite weapon, sighted and corrected by him.

The Indian pursuer, thinking that Mart carried only an old-fashioned muzzle-loader, incautiously exposed his head.

Crack! went Mart's piece, and the savage dropped in his tracks, as suddenly as poor Little Joe. Mart hastily crammed in a third cartridge, as he lay on the ground beside his horse; but he was too late. The remaining Mexican, the instant the second shot was fired, clinked on his horse's back, and galloped off down the cañon, without venturing more.

Mart stood up and took a long aim at the flying figure, but his hand trembled too much to trust it, and he lowered the weapon without firing. The horses of the slain man and the wounded one galloped off after their comrade, and the hunter saw them disappear.

He stood for a moment, regarding his fallen animal with a rueful look.

"Poor Little Joe!" said he, sorrowfully; "yer'll never rob yer nose ag'in' me any more, old hoss. Got to hoof it now!"

A fresh burst of shots from the valley below attracted his attention thereto, and he ran to the edge of Look-out Rock, just in time to see the gallant but fruitless rush of poor General Armistead. He beheld horse and rider beset by different bands, and saw uplifted war clubs waved over the prostrate man; when a loud shouting seemed to arrest the operation, and a Mexican was seen to gallop out from the woods, followed by a mixed crowd of Mexicans and Indians.

This man seemed to be a leader, for he was splendidly dressed, gold flashing from all parts of his person, and all over his horse-equipments. Mart saw the Indians cluster round him, and an animated discussion appeared to ensue, which ended in the figure of the General being raised from the ground, and brought before the chief, whoever he was. But Mart could not afford any longer view. He was in too hazardous a position himself. His General was a prisoner; and if he ever hoped to rescue him, he must secure his own safety and a fresh horse.

Pressed with anxious schemes, he went back to his dead mounting, and hastily untied the red blanket which was his sole baggage. He was about to start off down the ledge in search of safety, when he remembered the wounded man, who was still groaning, and went toward him. The Mexican was dying fast, shot through the lungs and choking to death. He gazed with glazing eye at the hunter, who demanded of him, in broken Spanish, where he belonged to.

The Mexican looked apprehensively at him, and muttered:—

"Mercy! mercy!"

He expected another shot.

"I won't shoot you," explained Mart; "only you must tell me where you belong to. Quick!"

"Comanche," gasped the Mexican, brokenly, and Mart started.

"The Comanche!" he exclaimed; "then it's time to go!"

He well knew the reputation of the infamous Comanche, as the most marvellous and cruel of Indians; at one time raiding on the Texas border; at another robbing his own countrymen or joining hands with Apache or Comanche on their "warrior moon rides" to Chihuahua and Durango; at one time a supporter of Juarez; at another of Maximilian; cheating, robbing, and murdering for mere pastime, it seemed.

Mart himself trembled for the poor General, fallen into the hands of this infamous brigand chief, and felt the keenest of apprehensions for his own safety. He left the dying Mexican, without casting another glance toward the valley, and began to run along the ledge, to find a way of escape.

As he had anticipated, the ledge of rock, after running

away round the mountain-side, finally disappeared altogether from sight, ending in a sheer precipice several hundred feet deep, along which it narrowed to less than two feet, for some distance, before it stopped. This narrow part wound in and out, and there were plenty of jutting points behind which he could hide, and where his position would be impregnable against assault, inasmuch as only one man could come to the attack at a time. It was equally clear, however, that he might be starved out, if his pursuers chose to lay siege to him there, for there was no way to escape.

Full of anxious foreboding, the brave scout yet determined to do his best. He retraced his steps, accordingly, to his horse's body, and found that his prisoner had not yet returned with reinforcements. He went to the edge of Lone-Seat Rock, and peered over into the valley. Indians and brigands were all clustered together there, most of them dismounted. He could distinguish the figure of the splendid leader, whom he took to be Cortina, who was on foot now, and talking to General Armistead.

The General was unbound and apparently at liberty, but a ring of brigands and Indians was all around him and was talking and cheering. Mart was puzzled to know what they could be talking about; but he was too anxious about himself to delay long, till he had secured what he came for. He went to the dead horse, which he unsaddled, and deliberately began to cut up.

"Ef yer come up hyar to ketch me," said Mart, as he detached a hind quarter with the skill of an old hunter or butcher, "yer shan't find me without somethin' to eat, ef I ar' a chunk o' horse. Now him and he d' need to yer!"

And as he spoke, he dropped the remainder of the carcass to the edge of the cliff, and tumbled it over into the valley below, where it crashed down into a clump of bushes, making enough noise to attract the attention of all the Indians.

Mart saw them all look up, and a devilish impulse he could not restrain prompted his next movement. The distance between him and them was about six hundred yards as the crow flies, although nearly a mile round through the cañon. Mart took a long squint at the guerrilla chief through the sights of his rifle, and fired.

He saw the Mexican start to one side as the bullet struck the earth close beside him, raising a little cloud of dust.

Then there was a chorus of yells and the cracking of rifles as the enemy fired a whole volley at him, most of the shots striking on the rocks at his feet, but one or two singing overhead. Mart saw a number of Indians and Mexicans rushing to their horses, and retired from the edge of the rock, muttering to himself:

"Thur now, Mart Bradford, ye durned fool! I hope yer satisfied. If yer'd left them cusses alone they mout 'a' gone off, and forget yer, and now they'll be bound to hev revenge, fur ye've riled Cortina himself."

He took up the quarter of his unfortunate horse, and carrying his saddle and rifle, trudged off along the broad ledge to the fortress he had selected for his defense. From a level it was perfectly impregnable, but as Mart went along and looked down below, he began to realize that his position would be in full view from the valley, and within long gunshot of an experienced mark man. As the thought struck him, the hunter paused and repented his rashness in provoking an attack. He was just at the end of the broad part of the ledge, and the narrow strip of rock before him was perfectly bare of cover down to the woods below. Mart looked back to the cañon he had just left, and imagined that he heard the shouts of his pursuers already.

Suddenly he heard a voice, the voice of the very girl he had been so vainly seeking for all the morning, calling out:

"Mart Bradford! Mart Bradford! Catch the rope!"

The voice came from above, and Mart instinctively looked up. The rock jutted out in a sort of battress beside him, ending in a flat platform far above, and here Mart saw Lily Armstrong herself, accompanied by a white man in the dress of a mounted sportsman, looking down at him.

As they looked down, Mart saw the man throw down the end of a long rope, and the next moment it was within his reach. As he snatched his rifle to his back and prepared to descend, the clatter of hoofs and feet became audible in the cañon behind.

CHAPTER VI.

RANDOLPH'S DEN.

When Lily Armistead rode into the cavern in the cliff the night before the arrival of Cortina's brigands at the rendezvous, she felt at first a little apprehensive. The darkness was so intense that she feared to ride into some hidden abyss. But her companion's horse went boldly on, as if well acquainted with the place, and Firefly followed in his footsteps.

When they had advanced, as the girl judged about a hundred feet, the red light ahead became quite distinct, and revealed itself as a small charcoal fire. Randolph pulled up, and shouted in Spanish:

"Mock! Mock! Come here!"

Immediately a dark figure sprang forward and came through the cavern toward them, gliding silently and stealthily through the gloom. Lily could only catch the outline of a plumed headless, when it came between her and the light, and the stranger was barefooted, as she judged from his stealthy approach.

Old Jeff evidently did not like his looks, for the old dog began to growl menacingly, and the dark figure halted.

"Keep him still, Lily," said Randolph. "This is Old Mock, the best friend we can have just now."

"Quite, Jeff!" said the girl, sternly. "Pequero, sí. Come on, Mr. Mock."

A deep guttural voice out of the darkness asked in broken Spanish, which Lily hardly understood, some question, to which Randolph replied:

"It is a friend, Mock, my cousin. There are Indians out to night on the young moon trail and we must shut up the cavern. See to it, while I take my cousin in."

The dark figure uttered a guttural exclamation and slipped past them in the darkness, with a soft patter of bare feet on the rock, and Jeff shrank close to his mistress with another dissatisfied growl.

Lily looked back to the entrance of the cavern, where the starlight could be seen shining in through the rugged gap, and saw the dark figure of an Indian, with a lofty plumed coronet on his head, appear in the midst of it. Then the Indian stepped to one side of the opening, and almost immediately Lily beheld a black rock slide forward across the gap and totally exclude the view of the stars outside.

"Now we are safe," said Randolph. "All the Indians of all the tribes could not find us here; for Mock and I are the only human beings that know the secret of the cavern. Come, Lily."

He took hold of her horse's bridle as he spoke, and led her on, wondering and amazed, toward the fire.

As they approached, and the light became stronger, Lily could see that they were in a low natural corridor of rock, which opened into a lofty cavern beyond. Here, on a sort of altar, burned the little fire whose light she had seen, and the circle of gloom outside appeared impenetrable.

Randolph dismounted from his horse, and assisted Lily to the ground, as soon as he entered the cavern. The floor was hard, and smoothed as if by the hand of man, and Lily could see, as she became accustomed to the gloom, various implements hanging up on the walls of the cavern.

The neigh of a horse, from the darkness beyond, was instantly answered by Randolph's charger and Firefly. Randolph took off the saddles, and turned both horses loose, before doing any thing else, when the two walked off in company, the young man's charger leading the way as if he knew it, and all three calling to each other.

Lily clapped her hands.

"Why, cousin Hal!" she exclaimed. "You have every thing complete here, haven't you? Stable and all! How did you find this place? It's like Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves."

Randolph laughed.

"All but the thieves, coz," he said. "It is a cozy place, but Mock and I are not mountain-robbers by any means; only quiet gentlemen, who don't want to be disturbed. Now let us have some more fire, for it is chilly to-night."

He disappeared into the darkness, and quickly returned,

with an armful of dry wood which he threw on the glowing charcoal, quickly producing a bright blaze. Then he took from a heap close by half a dozen torches of pine-wood, which he lighted, and stuck up in the wall all round. Lily observed with surprise that there were rings of metal let into the rock at the sides, to hold these torches, and naturally asked :

"Who put up those rings, cousin Hal?"

"You must ask Mock," said the young man, smiling. All I know is, that they were put here hundreds of years ago, by people long since dead. But here comes the captain himself. He can tell you all about it."

Lily turned round, and beheld the Indian named Moctezuma, or Mock, standing close by, surveying her curiously. Jeff was snuffing at the hem of the long, trailing robe that fell from the stranger's shoulders, with an air of lingering suspicion, slowly giving way to friendship.

Moctezuma addressed her in Spanish, saying :

"The little señorita shall hear when she has eaten."

CHAPTER VII.

MOCTEZUMA.

LILY understood Spanish pretty well, thanks to her Texan education, and she answered :

"Thanks, señor Moctezuma. I am as tired as harry as can be."

"The little señorita shall be served by the hands of the son of Moctezuma," said the Indian. "Once the captain was served by women. Now the woman is served by a captain. Be seated."

Lily's eye followed the wave of his hand, and beheld a little alcove in the rock, lighted with torches, where a table and several arm-chairs or thrones had been carved in the solid rock. They were all covered with elaborate sculpture, of strange and fantastic design, such as the girl had never seen before.

But on the table, and what surprised her most, were several bowls and dishes, apparently of solid silver and gold, but of the same fantastic model as the carvings. Lily, however, was too hungry to say much about the dishes, being more concerned about their contents, and when the Indian set before her a smoking bowl of some thick, savory soup, she made amends for her day's fast with good appetite.

Randolph and the Indian took their seats at the same time, and for some minutes all were too busy to speak.

At last Lily asked:

"Cousin Hal, did you make these dishes?"

Her curiosity revived as her hunger ceased.

Randolph looked up from where he was feeding old Jeff with bits of venison, and said with a smile:

"What do you think about it?"

"I don't see how you could?" said Lily.

"Neither did I," said her cousin. "Mock will tell you all about it. 'Twas he that first showed me this cavern."

Lily turned her gaze on the Indian, and surveyed him for the first time with great interest. Moctezuma had just risen from the throne, or chair, at the head of the table, which he had occupied during supper, and was stalking toward the fire in the large cavern, with the slow and majestic step of an emperor before his court.

At the first glance it was evident that he was no common Indian. His height was almost gigantic, and his features were of a nobility of expression to which the ordinary Indian is a stranger. The coronal of feathers on his head sprang from a circlet of gold and jewels of the most elaborate kind, and the mantle that drooped from his shoulders was made of the feathers of bright and tropical birds, woven together in the style which has become almost a lost art in modern times. His feet were bare, it is true, but around the ankles were curled two golden snakes, with jeweled scales.

"Who is he?" whispered Lily to her cousin.

"The last of his race," replied Randolph, gravely. "This is a depository of a secret for which the Mexican Government would gladly give millions of dollars. And yet, when I first saw Mock, I thought he was only a beggar, and saved his back from the lash of a Mexican ranchero, who would have flogged

him to death, tied to a tree. He has been grateful to me ever since."

Lily opened her blue eyes with wonder, and stared at Mock, who was lighting his long ed met at the fire. When he had done it, the Indian stalked away across the cavern to where Lily could now see, by the light of the torches, that the Indians were standing knee-deep in fodder, quietly munching away in great content. The full size of the cavern, now that it was lighted up, appeared to be much less than she had supposed, but several dark passages appeared beyond, that led to further recesses.

Moctezuma took down from the side of the rock on which two halters, with which he secured the horses that had just come in; and Lily noticed that the third one was a stallion mustang, while her cousin's horse was of the same breed as her own, a thoroughbred.

Moctezuma performed the duty of groom with the same dignity and decorum with which he had waited on table, when first they sat down. He looked like a dethroned monarch, reduced to serving himself by misfortune, and Lily said so to her cousin.

"He is a dethroned monarch," said Randolph. "And when all have their rights he will take the place of his ancestor, who was robbed by Cortes."

"But that can never be, Hal," said Lily; "I thought all the old Mexicans were dead."

"Most of them are," said Randolph. "But those who remain, the Apaches and Comanches for instance, bid fair to exterminate the descendants of the men who robbed them, some day. Poor Mock may never see that day, though. Come, coz; if you are ready, I will show you your quarters for the future, while we stay here, and in the morning we will set forth to find your father."

Lily sighed at the recollection, and looked very thoughtful. It was the first time that she had remembered it, in the novelty of every thing around her.

"Ah! poor papa!" she exclaimed. "How I wish he was here, too, and safe from those Indians! How shall we ever find him to-morrow, cousin Hal?"

"He will find us, I doubt not," said Randolph, cheerfully.

"These Indians will not hunt for him. They are after richer game, and that gully and valley are their regular road to Chihuhua. Sometimes three or four bands will rendezvous in that valley, but they never stray far to either hand."

He rose as he spoke, took down a torch from the wall, and led the way across the cavern to one of the dark openings. Lily followed; and beheld, to her amazement, a flight of steps cut in the solid rock, and winding *upward* into the heart of the mountain. Randolph led, and they ascended the steps to a corridor above, where the flickering torch announced the fact of some opening into the outer air. Randolph passed on down the passage, and presently turned into a square room, cut into the rock, off the passage, and adorned with a profusion of bas-reliefs, of the same fantastic character as she had noticed below.

In the center of the room a fire was burning on the rocky floor, the smoke ascending through a dark opening in the ceiling, and numerous torches, as yet unlighted, were stuck in rings all round the wall. The room was small, and the fire made it perfectly warm, but there was a stone couch at the side opposite the door, which was covered with numerous skins of bear and deer for further comfort. That was all the furniture the room contained.

Randolph handed his cousin the torch and bowed.

"I will leave you, *ma chère sœur*," he said, simply. "At the end of this corridor is a window. Don't take the light near it, or you will be discovered, perhaps. Good-night."

Without another word, he turned and went downstairs, leaving Lily alone. The girl was so struck with the singularity of her position that she could not help laughing to herself, as she sat down on the stone couch and surveyed her surroundings.

Old Jeff who had followed his mistress, thrust his nose into her back, and whined his surprise at their quarters.

"You may well be surprised, Jeff," said Lily, patting his back affectionately. "It's all just like a fairy tale this evening. Where we are is more than I can tell, Jeff; but it looks as if we were in some dead man's palace. Ain't it funny, Jeff? Look at those horrid, ugly faces, and beasts, and snakes, all over the walls. I suppose this is cousin Harry's room, from

the fire burning, and if so, I've turned him out of it. Well, one thing I know, I'm not going to sleep till I've seen every thing about this queer old place. And, first, we'll light these torches, hey, Jeff?"

She applied her single torch to every one of those stuck in the rings in the wall, and, as she did so, she noticed that the rings were made of some dull, grayish metal, that looked like lead. Lighting the whole circuit, her little chamber at once became a cheerful and pleasant place, and she noticed what she had not seen before, that there was a pile of dry firewood and fresh torches in a corner all ready to light. Lily called to old Jeff to follow her, and left the room for the window of the corridor that Randolph had spoken to her about.

The feeling of the soft breeze guided her to the spot, and she found that the corridor, after winding here and there, till the light from her room was quite invisible, finally emerged on a platform of rock, jutting out of the perpendicular side of the mountain. She commanded a full view of the pass by which she had come, which lay below her, and the point of Lookout Rock, beyond which the Apache fires were still burning in the valley.

Lily looked around her with great interest and then turned back and explored the corridor in the opposite direction. After passing her room, she took a torch and followed its winding till it ended in a maze of caverns and passages, so that she feared to get lost, and retraced her steps to the wonderful rock chamber, where weariness soon overpowered her, and she fell asleep on the stone couch, her head lying on Jeff's head, while the faithful bloodhound lay on guard beside her, blinking at the dying fire.

CHAPTER VIII.

CORTINA.

WHEN poor General Armistead was plucked so rudely from his saddle, stunned and powerless, he expected nothing less than immediate death. His pistol had been flung from his hand by the terrible jerk of the lasso, and his arms were fast pinioned to his side, while he was dragged along.

Then he was sensible of a clamor of voices above him, and the brandishing of weapons, when the shouts of a crowd of men, of, "EL CAPITAN!" suddenly put a stop to the dispute about himself. The Indians drew back from around him, and he found himself alone on the grass.

General Armistead was not the man to lie there long. He freed himself from the lasso, an easy enough job, now that it was loose, and scrambled to his feet, bruised, shaken, disarmed, but dazed and defiant.

He looked up, clearing the long gray hair from his eyes, and beheld a circle of Indians, Mexicans, and white men on horseback, all gazing at himself. As he did so, a man rode forward from the circle, and placed himself in front of the General, demanding in Spanish:

"Who is it?"

Armistead knew enough of the language to answer, giving his name and rank to the other. The horseman uttered an oath of mingled surprise and satisfaction.

"Ah! *por Dios!*" he said; "I have heard of the General Armistead. I am glad to meet him. I am the General Cortina, of the next high and mighty Republic of Mexico. **Death to the Austrian invader!**"

Armistead hardly understood him at first, but he caught the name. There were few Texans who had not heard of Cortina. He looked up, expecting to see a lanky ruffian of the bull-necked type, in the notorious guerrilla chief, and met the gaze of a dark, handsome Mexican, with soft black eyes, and the expression of a saint, the latter being slightly marred

by a red scar that traversed one cheek from the corner of the eye. Cortina had a very soft and melodious voice, and splendid teeth, although his smile, when he displayed them, as he frequently did, had in it something sinister and false, in spite of its assumed amiability.

The guerilla chief was dressed in the extreme of Mexican bravery, crimson velvet, yellow satin, heavy gold lace, and bell buttons, covering horse and rider alike, and his weapons being inlaid with gold.

Armistead regarded him with distrust and suspicion, and remained silent, while Cortina continued, blandly :

"I am glad to see the General Armistead. We want good soldiers in Mexico just now."

"Then, why do you receive them in this way?" asked Armistead, in a blunt tone, looking defiantly at the other. "You choose a nice way to welcome them to your country."

Cortina smiled and waved his hand carelessly.

"You should not have fled, General," he said : "my fellows are a rough set, and we have to be careful for fear of Austrian spies."

"I am no spy," said Armistead, indignantly ; "my uniform might have told you that. But a beaten soldier has no mercy to expect from such as you, señor. I know that. Be pleased to order your firing-party out and get this business done quickly."

Cortina laughed, so as to show his teeth, and answered :

"What for, *amigo*? I don't want to shoot you ; at all events not just now. We have need of such men as you."

Then, turning to the Indians, he gave some rapid orders in an unknown language. One of them immediately dismounted and brought the General the cap which he had been deprived of in his fall ; while another led up his charger, and offered him the pistol he had dropped. Armistead took his cap mechanically and stared at Cortina, as the chief dismounted from his horse and addressed him.

"Señor General," said the brigand, "accept for your rough treatment the apology of a man unused to excuse himself ; and let us have a little talk. *I want your friendship.*"

Armistead looked at the other curiously. He did not much relish the friendship of Cortina, but rash as he was, he

was not destitute of love of life, and he saw in the guerrilla's overtures safety for his own person at least. But he felt a fearful anxiety for the fate of his daughter, and dared not ask about her directly. He thought, however, that by inquiring for his companions in the valley, he might hear of her. As coolly as he could, he said :

"Last night, General Cortina, I encamped in this valley with ten of your countrymen. I see them not now. If you wish my friendship, you must release them."

Cortina showed his teeth again in the feline smile he affected.

"You are too exacting, General," he said ; "I know nothing of your comrades, who are probably supporters of the Austrian usurper. If they are still alive, you shall have them, but my Apache friends are rough if they are resisted. You understand ?"

He addressed a question to one of the Indian chiefs, and held quite a little conversation with him, apparently receiving some information that surprised him. Then he spoke to Armistead.

"Your comrades are alive," he said ; "and they have joined my band. *But where is your daughter ?*"

The last question was accompanied with a sinister smile, that made the old soldier tremble, not for himself, but for Lily.

"I don't know," he faltered. "We were out searching for her, when we came on your band."

"Ah!" said the guerrilla ; "you are fond of this daughter of yours, señor General? You would not like to see her among my men, would you ?"

Armistead turned deadly pale, and his eye glared.

"I would kill her first," he said, hoarsely. "What do you mean ?"

"That she will soon be here," said Cortina, slowly ; "and that on your services to us will depend *her* treatment by us."

Armistead flashed and paled alternately, and appeared unable to speak for a minute. When he did, he said :

"What do you want, man? Tell me quick, and I'll do it, if I can."

"My men are after her," said Cortina, smilingly, enjoying the tortures of his victim. "She can not escape, for the best trackers of the band are on her trail. Your comrade, the hunter, is being killed now, I doubt not, for I heard shots a few minutes ago. They are both on the 'Lost Road,' which ends in a precipice, and they can not escape."

"Quick, quick!" cried the old soldier, in an agony; "what do you want me to do to save her? Tell me, and I'll do it."

"You are an officer of artillery?" said Cortina, interrogatively.

"I am."

"And you Americans are all engineers and machinists?"

"No, no. But still—say I am—what then?"

"You are an engineer and machinist, is it not so?"

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"You understand how to make cannons and powder?"

"I do."

"Well then, we want you to make cannon and powder for us, up in the mountains, so that we may be able to fight the troops of this Austrian emperor. Will you do it?"

"Yes," said Armistead, immensely relieved. "Is that all?"

"No," said Cortina, smiling; "that is not all. That will be quite pleasant, I doubt not. The next thing is—"

A yell from the Indians interrupted him. Cortina looked round, and saw Mart Bradford standing on the top of Look-out Rock, with presented rifle.

The white puff of smoke was followed by a faint, distant crack, and the guerrilla chief started to one side, as Mart's bullet knocked a cloud of dust over his feet.

"Ah! *mil demonio!*" hissed the brigand, savagely. "This hunter is not dead, it seems. After him, men, quick! A thousand pieces to the man that brings the scalp of the insolent dog!"

In a moment the circle of brigands and Indians broke up, every man rushing for his horse. General Armistead expected that the hunter's rash shot would have brought him into fresh danger, but Cortina seemed to be too much occupied with vengeance on Mart to heed Armistead. The

gonzalez mounted his horse, and beckoned to the General to follow, saying :

"You shall be well treated, señor, in spite of your comrade's treachery, and you shall see him punished for that act of his. But beware how you try to escape. I will broil you on hot coals when I catch you. Come, then."

In a few minutes more the General found himself free, and on his own charger, with all his arms upon him, riding by the side of a brigand, in the midst of as hang-dog looking a set of cow-herds as ever bestrode horse.

He kept his own counsel, remembering Cortina's threat, but he privately resolved to escape at the very first opportunity, if he should find his child unhurt. In this strange position he rode by Cortina, while the chief, followed by all of his band, and his allies, the Apaches, galloped off up the gully, to the cañon, known by the Mexicans as the Lost Road.

Armistead recognized among the Mexicans his own comrades of the road so far. The rough *centralistas* and *arrieros* had joined in with Cortina's band, with the facility of Mexicans in a country afflicted with chronic revolutions.

They had lost all their goods, it is true ; but they seemed perfectly happy with the prospect of fresh goods, to be obtained by plunder from their countrymen. The General smiled bitterly, as he thought to himself how little title he had to scold at them, bound, as he was, to render service to a brigand.

So they galloped rapidly up the gully, and turned into the cañon down which the whole band clattered, headed by Cortina and Armistead, side by side.

As they neared the spot whence the daring hunter had last been seen, the General's apprehension had become keener and keener. He expected every moment to see Mart and his own charger, standing alone by the edge of a precipice, and without a way to escape. He had made up his mind to dash ahead at any risk, seize his daughter, and leap over the precipice with her, rather than see her fall alive into the hands of the brigands.

But as they neared the end of the cañon, his spirits insensibly rose as the empty way still appeared, and no Mart. He began to think that the gonzalez were mistaken, and that

some way of escape did remain in spite of their denials. At last the cañon ended, and the broad ledge of Lookout Rock presented itself before them.

At the end of the cañon lay two bodies, an Indian and a Mexican.

The Indian was dead—the Mexican only able to raise his hand feebly, to warn them not to ride over him.

Mart Bradford was gone!

Instinctively General Armistead looked up the side of the precipice, as he rode on by Cortina's side, expecting to see Mart climbing the rocks. But the rocks were as steep as the side of a house, smooth, basaltic columns, like organ pipes, jutting out here and there like the buttresses of a cathedral, but utterly impossible to climb.

The guerrilla chief dashed ahead up the ledge, his pistol cocked, and in hand, expecting every moment to see the hunter.

In vain. As far as eye could see, the ledge was perfectly void.

At last it became too narrow to ride on, and the guerrillas halted.

"He has crept on along the ledge," said Cortina, angrily; "and he is hiding behind one of these points. One of you men go ahead, and shoot him as you turn the corner. It is **only one man, after all.**"

But the guerrillas, though eager enough as long as they were all together, did not seem to relish the task of going singly along that narrow path, behind some jutting point of which was concealed a man who had already killed two others, single-handed. Not a volunteer stepped forward.

Cortina stamped his foot.

"Miguel Gonzalez!" he said to one man, "go forward, and **bring that fellow out.**"

The brigand hesitated.

"I shall get killed, General," he said, apologetically.

"What of it?" answered Cortina, brutally. "We must all die some day. Are you a coward, Gonzalez?"

"No," said the guerrilla, haughtily, "but I am not a fool, neither. We can but die once, and I want to have a chance for my life."

"We can shoot him from the valley, General," suggested another brigand. "The ledge is quite open, to that side."

Armistead noticed that Cortina's discipline was by no means strict; and on this occasion it was seen on what a slender thread his authority hung. The guerrilla chief glared furiously round at his men, but met nothing but sullen, disobedient faces.

"Well, then, cowards," said Cortina, savagely, "since you are all afraid to go there, come after me."

As he spoke, he ran on along the ledge, pistol in hand, and instantly a crowd of men followed him. The same man who had refused to go, was the first to follow.

General Armistead watched, with intense interest, the progress of the guerrillas. Cortina, himself, with his people velvet cloak thrown back to free his arms, went first, with a pistol in each hand. As he came to the first jutting point of rock, he halted, and extending his arm, fired the pistol round the corner of the rock at random, drawing back his hands as he did so.

There was no answering shot.

Cortina gathered himself for a spring, and vanished round the point, followed by the whole line of guerrillas, and still there was no firing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORD OF A GENTLEMAN.

SEPPENLY, in the rear of the guerrillas, behind the General's back, was heard a great crash, followed by yells and groans, and the terrified squeals of horses. Instinctively Armistead turned in his saddle, and beheld a great, round boulder of rock, which had crashed down into the midst of the party, bounding over the edge of the cliff into the valley below, carrying with it the bodies of several men and horses.

While every one was wondering, and stood aghast, unable

to move for fear, a second great rock fell from the mountain side above them, and crushed a group of Indians into mangled fragments, before it rebounded into the valley.

It was hardly down, before a *third* boulder, followed by a shower of smaller rocks, came thundering after; and an universal yell of terror from the whole party was accompanied by a regular stampede.

In the midst of the panic, a hollow, thundering voice was heard from the top of the cliff above them, shouting out some words in an unknown tongue.

General Armistead would willingly have staid where he was. He was convinced that, by some unknown means, Mart Bradford had ascended the cliffs, the more so as no shots were heard from the ledge beyond, where Cortina was. But his horse was not so willing, and a second time the poor general regretted that he only used a slight snaffle bit. The unruly charger, frightened at the falling rocks, made a single whirl round on his hind feet, and scoured away after his companions, in spite of his rider's efforts, carrying him over a hundred yards into the cañon, before he could pull up and turn.

When he did, the first sight that met his eyes was the form of his daughter Lily, dressed as he had last seen her, standing on the very pinnacle of one of the lofty pillars of basalt, her bright curls blowing in the wind, while she waved her handkerchief triumphantly towards him.

The slight, fragile form of the girl looked so spiritual, that Armistead almost doubted his eyes, but when the figure of Mart Bradford and a strange man were to be seen beside her, he doubted no more.

"All right, papa!" screamed down the childish voice of Lily from the top of the peak. "Run when you can!"

"Keep up your grit, child!" followed Mart Bradford. "We'll get you back again in a minute!"

The poor General, puzzled and confused, knew not what to say, when a rush of guerrillas on foot, being Cortina and his followers, warned him that he could not escape yet. Cortina's men looked pale and terrified, and even the guerrilla chief showed symptoms of strong fear. The figures on the cliff instantly disappeared.

"Vaya por ellos!" all the salutation Cortina bestowed on the General, as he and his men came past; and the presented pistols looked so menacing, that Arrieta had judged "discretion the better part of valor," as he rode off down the cañon, surrounded by the desperadoes.

They found the rest of the band huddled together around the next curve of the cañon, all jabbering at once, and uncertain if they were to return to the attack or not.

The Indians and guerrillas had received a terrible scare, besides the loss of eight or ten men and horses, crushed to death. Cortina himself looked frightened, and from the same cause as the rest, superstition.

Amid the jabber of Spanish around him, Arrieta caught the word:

"Mortezama's Mountain. Quetzalcóatl is angry."

He asked a Mexican near him what the matter was. The man, who was one of his old *corrideros* companions, shuddered as he said, in a low voice:

"It is Mortezama's mountain. The war-god dwells here, they say, to guard the treasures of Mortezama, against the time he shall come back to us to cut out the invader. He is angry with us, and has sent down fire to destroy us."

Arrieta made no answer. He looked as grave as he could, for he perceived that the true cause of the fall of the rocks was not understood by the guerrillas. The jabber of tongues and the din and confusion became deafening, until Cortina himself rode into the crowd, and shouted for silence.

"Back to the valley!" cried the guerrilla, angrily. "We deserve this misfortune for turning aside from our way. Leave Quetzalcóatl to himself. He has burned up that lumber-lug here this. Forward, and clear the road!"

There was an universal movement to obey the order. The influence of superstition upon these desperadoes was wonderful, and they were only too glad to go back to the valley out of the reach of the deadly power of Quetzalcóatl, the war-god.

Cortina rode last of all, while his men galloped ahead. The guerrilla chief was thoughtful and taciturn. Every now and then he would mutter a Spanish curse between his teeth, and look at Arrieta, who rode beside him, with a peculiarly unamiable glance.

When they turned into the gully, Cortina suddenly addressed the General, with great abruptness.

"General," he said, "it's all very well for my fellows to be fooled with stories of Quetzalcoatl, but I believe that your friends are at the bottom of this rock-rolling business."

"What do you mean?" demanded Armistead, calmly. "I don't understand you, General."

He did though, only too well, and was prepared to parry any inquiries the other might make.

"I mean," said Cortina, viciously, "that that cursed hunter of yours rolled those rocks down, and frightened my men."

Armistead smiled derisively, and answered:

"How could that be? The rocks were inaccessible. You saw that yourself. How could he get up there?"

"I don't know," said the guerrilla, grinding his teeth. "But I'll find out before I've done, or my name is not Jose Cortina."

"Will you go back, then?" asked Armistead, halting, and offering to turn his horse. Cortina looked at him suspiciously. It was the guerrilla's nature to distrust everyone.

"No," he said, curtly. "Perhaps you would like to go back and get me killed, señor General. But I have not done with you yet. There is work to do for you; and when our raid is over you shall come back and see me gut the eagle's nest. He can not get away from here till I come back, for the mountains are full of Apaches and Comanches preparing for the young-moon raid. You have heard of that, General?"

"I have heard that the Apaches raid as far as Durango at the new moon," said Armistead. "But how came you to be connected with them, señor?"

"I am the first man that has ever united the tribes under one head, and that head myself. I have planned it well. To-day and to-night there will be fresh arrivals till we are enough. Then we march for Mexico itself, sweeping back by Durango and Chihuahua to Matamoras. You are a Texan and know Matamoras well. It will be your part to show us how best to surprise those cursed Yankee soldiers in Texas, so that we can sweep away all the riches of Austin and Bexar. That is your task. How do you like it?"

"Not at all," said Armistead, boldly. "You can not count on me to do any such thing."

"Why not?" demanded Cortina, his eye beginning to glare. "Why will you not do as I order you?"

"Because I will not fight against my countrymen," answered the General, firmly. "You have no right to ask that of a soldier."

"Fool!" said the guerrilla, contemptuously. "What difference is there? This time last year you were fighting against them yourself in Smith's army. Why not now?"

"Because, since then," said the General, simply, "I gave the word of a Southern soldier never to raise my hand against the United States again. Not you, nor all the tribes of the mountains can make me break that word."

Cortina gave a sneering smile.

"You value your word highly, *senor* General. Perhaps you may feel inclined to throw it away before I have done with you. You have no conscientious objections to serving against Maximilian of Mexico, have you?"

"None whatever," said the General, anxious to conciliate as much as he could. "I am willing to teach your men how to serve artillery, and to do all I can for you, *here*; but over the border I never go more save as a friend to Texas."

Cortina made no answer till they were in the valley itself, and had crossed the stream to the camp of the night before. Then he said:

"I have heard that you Southerners are very proud of your faith, and would not break your words. I see it is true. I might kill you for your boldness, General; but I will not, on our condition. Give me the word of a southern officer that you will not try to escape from my care till I give you leave."

General Armstrong's heart beat loudly at the ominous request. Should he grant it, he felt that he might never see his daughter more, such was his scrupulous regard for his word. Should he deny it, the next moment bid fair to be his last, for there was a devilish gleam in Cortina's eye that proclaimed mischief; and he was surrounded by the desperados of his band.

The General was the only person, besides Cortina, who was caught napping, and the thought suddenly darted into his head; why not try to escape at once? He knew well that his fleet

race-horse was able to out-pace the best animals of the band, and he had a single revolver left, loaded and capped. All these thoughts flashed through his mind in an instant when Cortina asked him to promise not to escape. He delayed in his answer by evading the question.

"Why should you wish my promise, General?" he said. "I am quite safe here in the midst of your band, and could not escape if I would."

"No matter," said the guerrilla. "You may not always be so safe, and in that event I wish to keep you secure behind the barrier of your word when I have no guards to spare to watch you. One word, yes or no. Will you promise?"

As he spoke he fixed his eyes on Armistead, and showed his white teeth in a grim smile.

The General felt that the time was come. Cortina did not anticipate any attempt at escape right under his nose, and was likely to be careless. He resolved to try the escape at once.

"You asked me, General Cortina," he said slowly, to gain time, "whether, if I get a chance to escape I should take it at once. I have the honor to assure you that I shall. Good-morning."

As he spoke the last words he wrenched round the head of his self-willed charger, and buried both spurs in the animal's flanks with a fierce dig.

Wild with rage at the indignity, the high-bred animal uttered an angry squeal, and was off with a bound, as if he would leap out of his skin, and into the very wood path up which the General had ridden the night before. Only the wonderful velocity of his motion saved his rider's skin.

"Ping! piau! piau!" came three bullets in rapid succession close to General Armistead, as he lay flat on his horse's neck, but the next moment he was into the cover of the woods and felt safe again, for he well knew that his horse was the swiftest.

The cracking of fire-arms, and the slapping of bullets against the trees and stones all round him, warned him that his danger was only just begun, as the whole band took up the chase with loud yells.

CHAPTER X.

LILY'S ESCAPE.

LILY ARMISTEAD stood upon the summit of one of the peaks of Montezuma's mountain, and old Jeff was seated gravely by her side, while she scanned the valley far below, where the guerrillas and their confederates were still assembled. She carried the same long, powerful telescope which Harry Randolph had used the night before, and watched the valley intently.

Mart Brather stood a little in the rear, leaning on his long rifle.

"Dyer see the Gin'ral, Miss Lily?" asked the scout, anxiously.

"I do," she said. "He's on horse-back, talking to that Mexican. Ha! see there, Mart! Hurrah! hurrah! Papa's got away! Papa's got away!"

And in her excitement she flourished the glass about and danced for joy, so near the edge of the cliff that she nearly fell over.

Mart Brather's unassisted eye, clear as it was, could only distinguish a general commotion in the valley, but Lily insisted that she had seen her father gallop away into the woods at full speed, and that the Indians were after him.

When she recovered the glass, and again leveled it on the valley, there were very few men left round the fire. Most of them were off into the woods in pursuit of the fugitive; and Lily scanned the paths eagerly, in hope of seeing her father. Soon she saw him, at a long distance off, his horse going at a rapid pace and fast leaving all the pursuers but one.

This was the splendidly dressed Mexican, no other than General Rivera's splendid mustang, whose pluck enabled him to keep up with the General's charger for a certain distance. Lily saw the rest of the pursuers drop off one by one, and could distinguish that her father was turning his head as he

went. Presently the Mexican began to creep up to the General, and Lily watched the result with intense anxiety.

All of a sudden she waved the glass over her head a second time, and screamed for joy :

"Hurrah, Mart!" cried the girl, laughing. "Well done, papa! He let the Mexican come up with him, and then turned round and shot his horse. Pity he didn't shoot *him*, the villain! Ah, Mart! Papa's going to be safe, if we can get him in here. I'm going after him to tell him the way."

The madcap girl sprung from the pinnacle as she spoke, and ran off down the same corridor as the night before, through the opening in the rock. She had explored, already, every foot of that curious rock temple or palace, so similar to the excavations at Petra, which had puzzled her so much the night before. She had beheld the working of the rough doorway of rock, which, when closed, made the entrance perfectly undistinguishable from the plain black and gray rocks outside. She had heard from Mock the whole history of the Hidden Palace of Moctezuma, and wondered at the revelation. And now, already, her volatile and fun-loving spirit longed for fresh excitement, since the defeat of the Indians in such confusion.

Down the steps she ran, followed by old Jeff, barking joyfully, on her way to the stable, to get Firefly. Randolph and old Mock, since the rout of the foes outside, had left her to her own devices, and departed to some secret recess of the natural part of the cave, to which Lily had not yet penetrated. Besides the artificial chambers cut in the rock, it was evident that the natural cave extended a great deal further into the heart of the mountain; and Lily heard the click of tools, which told her that Randolph and the Indian were at work in the darkness.

She never heeded them. Her madcap brain was bent on nothing else than going forth, all alone, to find her father, and bring him up the cañon; and straight to the stable she went to find her horse.

Mart Bradford picked up the telescope she had dropped on the rock, and took a long survey. He never dreamed that the girl would execute her half-expressed design, and trusted that Randolph and the Indian would be able to stop her.

"Mighty queer all this, I swow," soliloquized Mart, as he brought the glass to bear; "Miss Lily, she *has* the durndest luck, and the rest on us hain't got none. Who'd think o' that darned Curica sittin' skeered and ruinin' like a ante-lope in a fire? And Harry Randolph and that old Injun. How the old satch did *they* ever cum hyar jist as they did? That 'ar young feller hev grow'd up into a good like y cuss, for all he war sick a peaked little shaver when he war a boy. Reuben had left about ten pound over me now, an' I used to threaten to spank him. Gosh! how time flies!

Mr. Bradford was recalled from his interesting reflections on the flight of time by the gliding back of one of the shorter pillars of rock below him, which seemed to revolve inwards on a pivot, leaving a lofty doorway open to the ledge outside. The place of joining was concealed with great art behind the natural pillars of basalt of which this door seemed to form a part, and the whole contrivance moved with perfect facility.

While Mart was looking down, wondering at the sudden opening, old Jeff came bounding out on the broad ledge, barking joyfully, and a moment after Lily's curly head made its appearance below, under the jaunty little hus-ar cap, as the little girl scampered out on the ledge, leading Firrly by the bridle.

Firrly neighed joyfully as he came out; his mistress laughed and clapped her hands; and old Jeff barked with all the power of his tremendous voice.

"Harrah!" cried the childish voice of Lily; "Jeff and Firrly and I! They can't keep us in their musty old caverns for ever. Here goes for a ride to find papa!"

Mart Bradford had been silent hitherto, not thinking the girl could have been in earnest, but when he saw her lay hold of the pommel of her saddle and climb up into her seat, he found breath to shout:

"Mumblar! Miss Lily! Darn it all! whar are yer goin'? Stop a bit, and I'll go with yer."

Lily looked steadily up, and saluted in military fashion.

"No use, Mart!" she cried; "Little Joe couldn't catch Firrly, and y've lost him now. Good-by. Back to supper. Love to Cousin Hal. Tell him he's very stupid to go

off among those black rat-holes, when there's a young lady in his house. Papa's ever so much nicer ; and I'm going for him."

She waved her whip in adieu, and cantered leisurely off, in spite of Mart's frantic shouts of warning to her to stop.

"Durn your skin for a obstinate minx !" growled the hunter at last, in a tone of complete exasperation, as he ran down the corridor as hard as he could tear, to find the stable and get a horse to follow.

But Mart, like many another man, found that most haste was worst speed. He had ascended to his present post by means of a rope thrown down to him across the face of the rock, and was wholly ignorant of the maze of passages in the interior.

Instead of seeing the stairs, he glided past them, and ran on down one of the numerous branching passages at the end of this upper corridor, which took him on, darker and darker, till he concluded to turn back. A second turning, about half way back, revealed to him a faint reflected glow of light at the end of a cross corridor, and he hurried along a tunnel, cut into the rocks for several hundred feet, and ending in a hole to the outer air, half overgrown with hanging plants.

Mart hastened to the natural window, and looked out, only to draw back in disappointment. The tunnel emerged in the top of one of the cliffs that composed the cañon, and commanded a view of a stretch of nearly a quarter of a mile.

In the middle of the cañon, going at an easy canter, was Lily Annstead, with old Jeff leaping along beside her ; and Mart realized that it was too late to stop her. He turned glumly away, and retraced his steps, muttering to himself :

"Darn the old rattletrap of a place ! If I'd a know'd my way, I s'pose I ment 'a done something. But ye mout as well try to pick up pins in the hell o' darkness the parson tells on us to find yer way hyarabouts. Yer in for it, Mart ; and ye mout as well take it easy, and see the old rat-hole, as Miss Lily calls it, darn her pretty little picter for a aggrawator."

And there out allowed a grim smile of amusement to ripple his weather-beaten face and black beard, as he thought of the

fancy child and her impudent ways. But the smile was succeeded by a frown of anxiety, as he also thought of the direction she had taken, and of the merciless ruffians she was likely to meet, made more savage by the escape of the General.

"Gosh!" he muttered, as he hurried on down the passage to return the way he came, "they won't stand no sich talk from her, cuss 'em! They'd wring her pretty little neck 'den almost as quick as they would a chicken's, and some o' them 'Pach Braves' would stick her scalp in their belts, and think they'd done something. And of that bloody greaser Cortina git a hit on her, it's good-by, Lily!"

All the while he was speaking, he was pursuing his way back; and suddenly perceived, at his right hand, another passage, as long as the one he was in, which appeared to slope downwards at a gentle angle, and terminate in the open air, from the light.

Without hesitation, Mart Bradford ran down the passage, which proved to be longer than he had taken it for, and finally arrived at the opening, and looked forth.

He uttered a cry of surprise at the sight.

Whatever he was, it was on the other side of the mountain, he felt sure. The tunnels through which he had traveled had lost sight of cañon and valley in their new outlet. He looked upon a small lake, of very deep emerald color, as smooth as a mirror, and totally surrounded by perpendicular cliffs of basalt or other volcanic rocks, as black as ink.

The only access to the water appeared to be from the window at which he was, for that opened on a square rock of basalt that was only a few inches above the water.

The emerald of the lake was so deep that Mart, for a moment, thought it was black, and the intense stillness of everything round him amazed the hunter. The lake could not have been more than three hundred feet across, and the cliffs rose up so black that he had the impression of being at the bottom of a well as he looked up.

After a few moments, the feeling of awe wore off from the mind of the hunter, and was replaced by natural curiosity and wonder.

Mart pushed the rock, and uttered a sonorous "ha!" with the intention of starting the deer, if there were any.

The instant he had done it, the whole of the hollow abyss seemed to reverberate to the roars of thousands of lions, with the beating of bass drums. The metallic tones of the black rocks, flinging the sounds back and forth, seemed to increase them ten-fold at every fresh echo, and when they finally died away in hollow murmurs, there was a fresh cause of disturbance.

A flock of doves, with the thunder and whirr of a thousand pair of wings, came dashing out from innumerable crevices of the rocks overhead, and went soaring and fluttering about from one side of the crater to the other.

Mart Bradford, iron-nerved as he was, started at the din and confusion of a flock of harmless doves, and shrunk back into the passage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HIDDEN PALACE.

WHEN the whirring and noise overhead gradually subsided, Mart looked out again into the great circular shaft or crater, and beheld the pigeons slowly settling back into the numerous small fissures and crevices of the rocks, which had at first escaped his observation. He was much puzzled as to his whereabouts, and was about concluding to return by the way he came, and try a fresh departure, when the sound of a soft, stealthy step behind him caused him instinctively to turn round.

His eyes met the glowing orbs of the gigantic Indian, Hock, or Mochzuma, who demanded, in his deep, guttural tones, in Spanish :

"What wants the hunter by the Hidden Lake? Quetzal-coatl will be angry with him."

Mart had lived on the Texan border too long not to understand him. He answered at once, in the same language :

"I lost my way in your confounded passages. The little *serpenta* has escaped, opened the door, and ridden away to find her father. I want a horse to follow her. How shall I proceed?"

Mock displayed no surprise at the intelligence. He only beckoned with his finger and turned away.

"Follow Mockanna," he said, gravely. "We will tell the white brother, and go after the child."

Mart was not the man to object. He followed his guide away from the secret lake, and they went along the passage for a few feet, when Mock turned into a small opening, and Mart reached the bottom of a flight of steps.

Up the steps they went for some distance, a reddish glow at the top of the stairs lighting them. They finally emerged in the midst of a dark cavern of great dimensions, in the midst of which burned a great fire of logs, at one side of which stood Henry Randolph in his shirt-sleeves, holding a bar of iron in the flame, while an anvil beside him announced that he had turned smith for the nonce. He seemed to be surprised to see Mart Bradford in that place, and hurriedly demanded:

"How came you here? Where is Lily?"

In as few words as possible Mart told him the whole story, and asked for a horse to follow the rash child.

Randolph left the bar of iron in the fire, and hurriedly beckoned to Mock, with whom he held an animated conversation in low whispers. Both of them seemed to be more disturbed at the presence of Mart Bradford than at the flight of Lily. Presently Randolph addressed the hunter.

"Bradford," he said, "if we had left you outside to the mercies of Osage, you would have been dead long since."

"I know it," said Mart, soberly; "I know it, Master Harry, and I'm much obliged to yer."

"Now, then," continued the young man, "through our carelessness you have learned something we did not wish you to know, but you must not learn any more now. If we take you down home to the stable, and set out with you to find Lily, you must allow yourself to be blindfolded while we take you. Will you do it?"

"Sure," said Mart, bravely; "ain't no more n'r right, Master Harry. I'm agreeable."

"Enough said," replied Randolph. "Mock, blind him and lead him."

In a moment, the feather manile of the Indian was over

Mart's head, and he felt himself grasped by the hand and led away, along passages that echoed to the tread, and through larger apartments, spread with soft sand, till he lost all sense of his whereabouts. Once, as he was following the quick steps of Randolph, the latter seemed to have stumbled over something metallic, which upset, for Mart heard the unmistakable clink of metal against metal, ringing loud and clear.

Soon, however, he felt the warmth of a fire on his hands, and the clank was twitched from his head. He looked around, and found himself in the outer cavern into which Lily had been introduced, the night before, and beheld the great portal outside, wide open to the white light of day, while he stood by the small, glowing charcoal fire, on which were several pots and saucepans, of some dull, whitish metal that Mart did not know of. His acquaintance with metals was limited to the steel of his weapons, and the bright silver of coins.

But he had no time for observations. Henry Randolph was turning down his sleeves, and ascending the velvetreen shooting coat that had surprised Mart so much, when he first saw it, that morning.

"You can take Mock's horse, Mart," said the Virginian, briefly. "Mock will take care of the cavern, and secure our retreat, in case we have to run from Cortina. Come, saddle up."

As he spoke, he took down his own Mexican saddle from the peg whereon it hung, and encircled therewith the back of some thoroughbred horse which he affected, in common with most Southerners who can get them.

Mart led out the spotted mustang, which he found an excellent little horse, and saddled it, with much satisfaction, with his own saddle, which he saw lying on the ground by the doorway, just as he had dropped it before taking his climb up the rope. The mountain and Indians had left it there, as not worth the trouble of picking up, in the midst of their dreadful scare.

Randolph put on his arms, which Mart noticed were all of the best and latest patterns, both rifle and pistols; mounted his horse, and rode out on the ledge, followed by the hunter.

As soon as they were outside, the door was closed, and if Mart had not seen the manner of it, he would have sworn that the side of the rock was entirely unbroken, so artfully were the joints concealed among the natural fissures and roughnesses of the basaltic pillars in front.

Then the two rode away to the cañon in silence.

There were numerous splashed pools of blood, and fragments of hair and flesh, broken weapons, etc., lying on the ledge, marking the path of the destroying bowlders of rock, cast down in the morning, but the victims of the crash had disappeared, carried over the ledge into the valley below.

The two bodies, proofs of the deadly aim of Mart himself, still lay at the entrance, and Mart saw that the Mexican was dead as well as the Indian.

"Who killed them, Mart?" asked the young man, pointing to the bodies as he passed.

"This did," said Mart, proudly: "but 'twas a close shave, Master Harry. If you hadn't 'a' pulled me up when yer did, I might 'a' been a poorer horse than a horse."

"Which way did they go?" next demanded Randolph, as he looked eagerly among the numerous footprints in the cañon, for the track of the thoroughbred.

"Straight down the cañon," answered the hunter, striking into a gulch. "She must 'a' come past the gully by this track, if she don't come across my horse thieving 'Pash or Comanche!"

Randolph frowned anxiously.

"The English child?" he said. "That's jist what she may well do. There has been a great raid preparing for some time past, and I have been watching them from the other side of the mountains. It seems that Apaches and Comanches have joined together, and have bargained with that scoundrel General Armitage for a great price. Now, if they only—"

He said no more. Some thought seemed to sting him, for he jerked his horse forward with the spur, and fled away from Mart, but the little horse does as he would. A very few minutes of such riding brought them to the first gully, down which General Armitage had been chased in the morning, and the young Virginian pulled up.

His progress henceforward was as cautious as it had been

headlong before. Both horsemen advanced at a foot pace, with their cocked rifles on the saddle-bow, ready to fire a snapshot in an instant.

Leaving Mart to guard the cañon, Randolph rode down the gully to where a view of the valley was commanded from the precipice. He thought it quite possible that some enemy might be lurking there, to intercept his return.

But the gully was quite empty, and so was the valley, save for a few warriors, squatted round the fires. Randolph's gaze turned to the woods beyond, and beheld his suspicions confirmed at once.

A long file of Indians was moving along one of the paths in the forest, a single tracker being ahead of them, following the trail of some person or persons unknown.

On another path were some Mexicans, easily known by their dress, and these men were riding rapidly on a straight path, as if to try and cut off distance to some point ahead. Randolph scanned the woods below for a long distance, in the hope of catching sight of General Armistead, but the latter had vanished.

The young man rode back to Mart Bradford, and the two followed the cañon cautiously to its introduction with the second gully.

Here they advanced with great care, expecting every moment to be saluted with a shot, but the gully was empty of people, although the whole of its surface was furrowed with hoof-tracks, of which some had evidently been made that very day. But Mart caught sight of one track in the midst of all, fresher than any, the mark of the small, neat horse-shoe that told him when Freddy had passed.

"Thar' she ar'!" he said, in a low tone. "They hev took the back track into the woods, and 'tis all plain trackin' thar'. Come on."

The two trailers crossed the gully at a gallop, and followed the transverse fissure or cañon that led to the woods beyond. Once in these woods, they had not much fear of being caught, having good horses under them.

A very few minutes brought them to the bare rock, over which Mart Bradford had tracked Lily the evening before, leisurely walking her horse down the deer-track in the

woods, while old Jeff leaped around her, whining and barking.

"Damn the dog!" growled Mart, sulkily; "if there's Indians in sight, he'll go for 'em, cuss his stupid head; and if there's nothin' he'll rouse 'em. What's the use of such ornery brutes?"

Jeff answered the question himself, by catching his scent, and coming galloping back to meet him, yelping for joy. The old dog, as well as his mistress, seemed to be "out for a spree," and glad to be free from the dark caverns of the Hidden Palace.

Lily looked back and saw the two horsemen pausing on the rocky slope, to look at her. The mad cap girl waved her hand with a gay laugh of defiance and screamed back to them with a perfect fearlessness, that contrasted strongly with their own caution.

"Catch me if you can, cousin Hal! I'll bet ten to one on Firefly. Come, sir! a race!"

For one moment Randolph turned pale, as he thought of the consequences of her reckless outcry. Then he turned to Mart, with a resigned air.

"They can hear every word in the valley," he said; "and they're sure to try and cut us off now. We must take to the woods, and find them the best way we know how, Mart. Oh! that foolish child! And yet, she's so pretty, that one cannot find it in one's heart to be angry with her. We must save her, Mart."

"We will," said the hunter, firmly. "Oh! Miss Lily, little as you know the country you're givin'. Gosh! if she knew them 'Pash, she moun't be so smart."

"What Hal are you coming?" called back Lily. "I'll give you a good start before I run. Hurry, now!"

Randolph swung his horse down the rocks toward her, without saying a word, till he could speak low. Then he said:

"Hurry, now! These woods are full of Indians all round, and every man is looking for your blood!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE LASSO TRICK.

INSTEAD of appearing alarmed by the news, Lily only laughed.

"I know it," she answered, merrily. "Ain't I going to find papa and get him from them? I saw him gallop into the woods, and they were all after him. No you don't, Hal. You can't come that over me. Good-by. I'm going to catch him! Catch me, if you can!"

The last words were rapidly uttered, as Randolph slowly approached her, in the hope of catching her by the unawares. But the shy girl was not to be caught. She was gone like a flash down the path, laughing loudly as she went; and Randolph, after a moment's hesitation, gave the spur in, and followed, full speed. He felt that their only chance was to get ahead of the Indians in the forest, and trust to luck to find the General and escape.

For several minutes both horses seemed to fly rather than run; and trees and bushes whizzed past them, as they went, in the swift burst of a three-hundred racer. But Bradford was left far behind on his little mustang, and soon ceased to hope, finding himself completely outpaced.

"Now if they don't run into them cussed 'Pash,' he muttered. "No use on the plain kin catch them two flyers. As for us two, we'd better get to cover kinder sudden. We kurn't keep up that ar pace long."

He ended the action to the words, riding into the cover of the woods, just as the flying figures about disappeared round a turn of the deer-path.

Meanwhile Lily dashed on at full speed, all dead panther along behind, the thunder of hoofs in the rear telling her that she was closely pursued. She encouraged Firfly with voice and whip, and flew along, never heeding what a noise she was making, but merrily remarking that the hoof-beats of her pursuer were coming nearer every moment.

At last she dashed into a broad, green path, where the old tracks of horses and mules showed that a bridle-road had existed for some time. Instinctively she turned her horse's head up it, and fled eastward, Randolph following close behind.

As the young man turned into the path, his quick, watchful gaze fitted toward the quarter whence he expected enemies. He was not mistaken. Lily's reckless laughs and screams had attracted the notice of the Indians, and he saw the white body galloping up the path in chase, no longer on a trail, but in full view.

A yell of the fiercest kind announced that the savage raiders saw him, and then he went after Lily.

There was no occasion to tell her any thing now. The girl had heard the yell, and realized, in a moment, the full perils of her situation. The Indians were not a quarter of a mile off, and their only dependence was on the speed of their horses.

The very moment they dashed into the path, their pursuers yelled and fired a volley, and the bullets went pattering among the leaves and branches, all round and overhead.

Lily was breathless of place, principally from her ignorance of the danger; and she turned her head and waved her whip in the air with a defiant laugh, just as Randolph dashed up alongside. There was no time to say much.

"Follow me!" was Randolph's only remark, as he swept along the path like a whirlwind. A terrible anxiety was on his face; for he knew every foot of the woods, and knew that their present road took a great curve further on, and that a straight path from the valley intersected it there.

If Cuthbert's men were on that path, he and Lily would be intercepted, and one or both taken!

Full of anxiety, he entered the curve, telling Lily to keep on the outside, so that he might encounter the expected enemy ahead of them first, and save her.

They had hardly entered the curve, when Lily pointed ahead with her whip, and screamed out:

"Papa! Papa! There he is!"

Randolph looked ahead; and there, sure enough, was a man in a gray military uniform, cantering along on a bay

horse, who seemed to be quite at his ease, though going at a great pace. The General heard the scream and the sound of hoofs, and turned his head. As soon as he recognized the trim little figure, in the lasso cap and brown latic, the old warrior pulled up, and allowed them to come up. Randolph feared that Lily would halt, too, she seemed so overjoyed to see her father.

"General Armistead!" he shouted as he galloped up. "Don't stop, sir. Indians are behind us, and Cortina is ahead. Run for dear life."

The General was quick enough to understand. He nodded his head, turned his horse, and galloped along by Lily's side, uttering blessings and reproaches, both together, to the little runaway, broken by the rapid gallop of his horse, weeping and laughing together, and otherwise conducting himself with a reckless disregard for the presence of danger and a stranger, that amused Randolph.

"Who are you, sir?" bellowed the General at last turning to him, and trying to make himself heard over the thunder of hoofs.

Randolph told him; and the warm-hearted Texan grasped his Virginian cousin's hand with earnest gratitude and affection, as they galloped on, side by side.

But there was not much time for compliments. They were fast nearing the place, where, if at all, they were in danger. Beyond that the woods opened out into the prairie and desert country, and they would not be exposed to surprises. Randolph pointed ahead to an open glade, about a quarter of a mile across, into which their road led them.

"In the middle of the glade," he said, "the cross-path comes out. Once past that, we are safe."

As he uttered the last words, they swept out into the glade, and observed with pleasure that it was still empty. But they had hardly attained the middle when a loud yell from their left startled them, and out of the dreaded cross-path galloped Cortina himself and a crowd of guerillas, with exulting shouts, swinging their lassoos, in expectation of an easy capture. The poor General uttered a groan. He remembered his own hard fall of the morning from one of those same lassoos, and dreaded a repetition of it.

But Randolph showed no fear.

"Keep to the right and spur like the devil!" he shouted, as he waved his hand toward the end of the glade. "You can just escape past, and I don't fear the lassos. I'll cover you. Quick!"

The General needed no incentive. Their three horses had been going at an easy gallop, having outpaced the mustangs of the pursuing Indians. They were, therefore, able to screw out considerable speed still, by a vigorous dose of spurs. Lily and her father both plied steel and whip with frantic energy, and their horses, seconding their efforts, fairly seemed to fly.

They kept close to the woods, while Randolph galloped boldly toward the guerrillas, pistol in hand, firing shot after shot into the midst of them, undaunted by their crowd. Indeed, their very crowd served to make his fire more deadly, for every shot told, and he always took steady aim.

The six shots exhausted, brought him close to Cortina, skimming over the green across the guerrilla's track, while the General and Lily were far beyond lasso reach now.

The Mexicans had not fired a single shot. They depended too much on the power of their lasso, when they got near enough.

Now Randolph stuffed back the pistol in his belt, and whipped out a broad knife, over two feet long, and sharp as a razor. With a shout of defiance he darted across Cortina's track; and the guerrilla hurled his lasso at the same moment.

The sinuous weapon curled and glided through the air in graceful curves, hovering in a complete circle over the head of the young Virginian, and Cortina's horse was pulled on its bridle at the same moment, by the powerful Mexican gag-bit.

But just as the lasso descended, Randolph with a dexterity that he never could have learned in Virginia, threw up his left hand, the reins hanging loosely in it, as high as his crown, and crouching his body as he crouched over. At the same moment, up went the long knife in his right hand, point up.

The circle of the lasso fell on the line of the reins, and

was thrown off before it could settle, to the right. The edge of the knife was the only thing inclosed in the noose as the young adventurer sped on; and the snap of the tough leather thongs proclaimed that Cortina's lasso was cut.

Randolph uttered a triumphant shout, and waved the knife, to dare the others to come on. A second lasso was almost instantly thrown, only to share the fate of the first.

Again the daring horseman threw it off with knife and reins, catching the noose on the knife, held point up, and cutting it by the mere rush of his horse.

But he did not propose to try this game too long. The General and Lily had gained nearly a hundred yards by this time, and were on their way to the prairie. With a final taunting shout, the Virginian dug in the spurs, and shot away ahead, on the track of his friends.

As he went, he returned his knife, and drew his second revolver.

Turning round in his saddle as he fled, he fired shot after shot into the crowd of pursuers, hitting one or two, and slackening their ardor considerably.

Had they been Anglo Saxons, the desperate resistance of a single man would have maddened them to frenzy, and they would have come after him, firing volley after volley, till not a shot was left in pistol or carbine. But, being Mexicans, they began to pull at their horses' heads, and when the three thoroughbreds shot away from them, going two feet to their one, they gave up the chase with singular unanimity, growling ferocious curses of what they would do, *if* they caught the "accursed Yanquis."

Meanwhile, Randolph rejoined his friends, and the three slackened their pace, as they emerged from the shelter of the woods on a green open prairie, and saw their pursuers halt.

But the halt was not for long. The Indian pursuers from the rear came up, and joined Cortina's Mexicans; and the whole held a consultation, which ended in their dashing off into the woods again, on a diagonal path, leaving the prairie.

Randolph turned to General Armistead.

"General," he said, "it was as I feared. They have cut

us off from the mountains; and if, as I think, they have more friends coming behind them, we shall have to flee before these accursed riders all the way to Chihuahua, if we don't find harbor sooner."

General Armistead looked aghast, but Lily clapped her hands.

"Cousin Hal," said the reckless girl, "of all things in the world, there's nothing I've longed so much to see as a *real* raid, where they fight, and now I shal see it. Won't it be fun?"

Randolph pointed to a fresh body of Indians coming out of the woods to the north.

"You'll have all the fun you want," he said, drily; "you've got right in the track of the 'Young Moon Raid,' and here come the raiders."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLUCKY LITTLE GIRL.

It was indeed true. The approaching Indians came on another path, that skirted the foot of the mountains, and Randolph pronounced them to be Comanches, at the first glance.

"That's what they've been waiting for," he said to the General. "If it had not been for these Comanches, the rest would have been off to the southeast long ago. Here they come now."

"Will they chase us, think you?" asked Armistead, anxiously, as he turned his horse, and rode away with Randolph.

"Not directly," said the other, glancing back, as he went; "They are spreading out to intercept our retreat, you see, but they shan't go beyond a walk. They'll round up the men that are left, and they will try to cut us off from getting to the mountains on that side. Well, like I know this country well, and I can show them a trick worth two of that."

He continued his course at a foot-pace, talking calmly, and not seeming to be much alarmed.

The General, soldier as he was, was decidedly the most nervous one of the party. He looked back at the Indians, and then at Lily; and seemed to grow more uneasy every moment.

"Haden't we better ride faster, Randolph?" he asked, presently. "We're not leaving those Indians any."

"We don't want to, just yet," said Randolph, calmly. "It's only about noon, now, and I want to keep them in sight till nightfall. Then I shall strike across the country, and circle round which ever flank is left unguarded. Once back in the mountains, all together, we shall be safe."

"Have you a safe retreat there?" asked Armistead.

"Oh, yes, papa," interrupted Lily. "The queerest old place you ever saw. There are ugly stone carvings all over it, in the bottom of a cavern, and there's a stone door, and chairs, and every thing else, you know, all made of stone: you never saw such a funny place. And, cousin Hal, he lives there all alone, with a funny old Indian, called Mock; and what they do with themselves is more than I can tell; for they went and hid themselves away in some rat-hole or other, this morning, and left me and Mart all alone to ourselves. I got tired of that sort of thing, you know, and I ran away to find you, papa."

"Is Mart Bradford with you?" asked the General, bewildered with the confused account of his daughter.

"Yes," answered Lily. "But where he is now, goodness only knows. He was behind, in the woods, with cousin Harry; but now he's gone."

In a few words Randolph explained to the General the circumstances under which he had left Mart.

"He can take care of himself, General," he said. "Mart Bradford is an old hunter and Indian-fighter, and these raiders are too glad to have us in front, where they want to go, to trouble themselves about him."

"But how did you come here, Harry?" asked the General. "The last I heard of you, you were serving with the Yan-kee men!—Federal troops, in your native State, against Lee. What brings you here?"

"That's my secret, General," said Randolph, smiling. "I can only tell you that I came down to Mexico, at first, to

turn miner, on a Government grant, but what keeps me here is another matter. We had better get out of our troubles before we discuss these things. Our pursuers are creeping up to us, I think."

It was true. The Indians and guerrillas in the rear had at first spread out in an irregular skirmish line, to cover a great space of ground, and confine the fugitives to the open country, without exerting themselves. Now, however, they began to move forward, at the loping, tireless gallop of the mustang, and the fugitives were put to speed once more.

They rode along a beautiful green stretch of prairie, about twenty miles across, bounded on each side by mountains, barred in forests. A river or rivulet ran through the midst of it, and not far off was a low mass of grey walls, like ruined buildings.

The General pointed toward it, and suggested that it must be some Mexican village, but Randolph shook his head.

"These are old Aztec ruins," he said. "They are scattered all along this river, and the Mexicans call it 'Cans Grandes,' or Great House river. These mountains are full of wild passes, and on the other side lies Chihuahua. They are the Sierra de los Patos."

Very little more conversation passed between them. Their horses left the pursuers behind with apparent ease; but, whenever they halted, the Indians crept up again, always keeping up the same loping gallop, that never seemed to tire.

About three in the afternoon, they obliqued toward the river, at a point where Randolph told them a ford existed, and crossed it without much difficulty. Below the ford was a deep pool, and above it were some formidable rapids, and the passage seemed to be so easily defensible, that Randolph proposed they should attempt to hold it.

"They can not cross anywhere else without going at least a mile," he said. "And we can gain time to rest our horses. These trees are good cover."

The General agreed. On the bank was a clump of sturdy live oak trees, heavily draped with moss, and the horses were sheltered behind thirty feet of solid timber, where they were perfectly safe.

The further back of the stream was quite bare, the ford

passage was very narrow and rocky, and the position was excellent.

Ten minutes after they had taken their posts behind trees, the tramp of horses on the opposite bank announced that their foes approached.

They were all there, Indians and Mexicans, at least a thousand strong, with Cortina at the head of the mob. They rode rapidly, and with but little order; for they had lost sight of the fugitives, whom they believed to be hidden by the screen of wood on the further side, and riding hard for the Sierra.

Into the water plunged the foremost files, only to be thrown into confusion by the rapid current among the rocks, for the stream made an abrupt fall of several feet, at this point, over a ledge of rocks.

The horses stumbled over the rocks and one another, and several, losing their footing, were swept into the deep pool below, where the banks were several feet high, and upright. Once there, they could not get back, and were compelled to float all the way across, till an eddy landed them on the same shore that they had just left, but a quarter of a mile below.

It was into the midst of this confused group, huddled together as they were in a heap, that Harry Randolph, General Armistead, and his daughter, Lily, sent three conical balls whizzing.

Even the General's pistol was useful at that short range, and two men, both Mexicans, dropped from their horses into the stream, and floated down, dead or dying.

Lily clapped her hands with glee. The child was not near enough to see the expression of the dying men, or she might not have done so. But she saw the remainder of the Mexicans scramble out of the water with edifying alacrity, and waved her rifle in triumph.

"See 'em run, pa?" she screamed. "Didn't I do that nicely? Bring on your Indians, if you want them killed! Hurrah!"

"Load up, and don't talk, child," said Randolph, laughing. "You're quite a marksman, Lily, I declare."

"Ain't I?" said Lily, innocently, unconscious of the admiration she excited, as she popped a fresh cartridge into the chamber of her little Ballard rifle.

For the first time, perhaps, since he had been in her company, Randolph looked at the bright curly head, and trim little figure of his cousin, with particular attention. And certainly she looked exceedingly pretty and animated as she stood there, without a symptom of fear in her composition, peering over a low fork of the tree, at the huddled group of Mexicans on the opposite bank.

If fear can be so much extenuated by the fact of beauty in a woman, as to become not only excusable but charming, bravery, under the same circumstances, is positively bewitching. The girl whom Randolph had hitherto looked upon only as a wild, little, trouble-some elf, born to bring others into scrapes, became invested with a new and strange interest in his eyes, from the moment he saw her standing there, bright, beautiful, and fearless, surveying the host of enemies on the opposite shore. It seemed to him as if he had been blind, and that a sudden revelation had come to him in that moment, for his heart gave a bound, and he realized that the trouble-some elf had become a power to him.

But there was no time for more than the mere flash of thought. His attention was too nearly concentrated on Comanche's raiders, to be spared for long. They could hear the sharp, clear voice of the guerrilla leader on the opposite bank, announcing his men for cowardice, and exhorting them to advance.

Presently a file of men dashed into the water, one behind the other, in the only practicable passage, and went splashing through to the middle of the river, trying to gallop.

But the water was too deep to permit speed, and the only result was to make the horses trip and stumble as they went, one of them being swept down into the pool below.

The crack of Lily's light rifle rang from among the drooping moss on the branch of the live-oak, and the foremost horseman, a Comanche Indian, threw up his arms with a yell, and dropped.

Immediately a shower of bullets, fired at guesswork, rattled among the branches of the live-oak, and knocked pieces of bark and leaves all over the girl's drooping form, as she slipped behind the huge trunk.

Only a single shot replied to it. This was Randolph's.

The young man had watched his opportunity, and sent a bullet through *two* of the men in the water, just as they were in line together.

The first dropped into the water, the second uttered a yell of pain, and hung over his saddle-bow, sorely wounded. With one accord, the rest turned back, and scrambled up the bank, whence no commands could drive them again into the water.

Lily was delighted with her second shot. She could not see the Mexicans plainly on the bank from her position behind the drooping moss, but she knew they were gone from the water.

As soon as she had reloaded, the reckless girl ran boldly out from the shelter of the tree, and showed herself on the bank. She was instantly seen, and a dozen carbines were leveled at her, and fired in haste. The bullets snapped and cracked all round her, but she never heeded them. She was bound only to have a good shot, and she made her aim long and deliberate, sighting for the midst of a group of Mexicans.

As the little rifle cracked, she saw the group break up and scatter, leaving a man on the ground. Lily uttered a shrill shout of triumph, and ran back, laughing, to the shelter of the tree.

To her surprise, her father and Randolph were both deadly pale, and clutched her by the arms, as if each wished to claim her for his own property.

"Lily! Lily! How can you be so rash?" urged Randolph, quivering. "They nearly hit you, child."

"Give me that rifle," said her father, angrily. "You'll get yourself killed at this rate. You shan't do it any more, miss. I won't stand it. How dare you frighten me so?"

And the old man, trembling all over, snatched the girl to his heart, and began to hug and cry over her, saying, in an absurdly contradictory manner, the very next minute:

"My brave pet! My little Lily! Don't be so rash, my darling; for, if they kill you, I shall die, too."

And Lily, for the first time that day, looked very sober, when she saw the tears in the strong man's eyes, and knew she had caused them.

CHAPTER XIV.

MART ON THE TRAIL.

MART BRADFORD rode cautiously through the woods from where he had been left, listening to the sounds of the hurly-burly ahead of him. He trusted to the eagerness of the Indians to pursue his companions to secure his own safety; and the quick-witted scout was not mistaken. The long file of pursuers went up the cross-road or bridle-path at full speed, and Mart traced them by the sound of their horse-hoofs, till they were past; when he boldly rode out into the path after them.

He heard the sound of Randolph's pistol shots, and the yells of the disappointed Mexicans, growing fainter in the distance, and followed the path to the open glade where the Virginian had escaped the lessons of the guerrillas; still without catching sight of any one.

Here he dismounted, and tied his horse in the woods; while he strode forward to the edge of the prairie, on foot, to reconnoitre; arriving just in time to see the Comanches join their comrades, and pursue the fugitives up the broad valley of Casas Grandes River.

"Wagh!" said Mart, with an accent of disgust. "What'll become o' them babies now, 'thout me to take keer on 'em? Randolph are too young. He hev'n't ben long enough on the plains to know how to circumvent them cusses. Reckin I'll hev ter go along ahint them, and watch fur a chance to git them out. Ef I don't, they mout get druv all the way to Chihuahua, and shot by the greasers in mistuk fur Injuns. Hey! Who comes hyar?"

The exclamation was caused by the galloping past of the messenger, to rouse the Indians in the valley. Mart comprehended it as such. He waited till the messenger, an Indian, had gone past, down the old bridle-road; when he stole back to his horse, and rode off leisurely after the messenger, toward the valley. He was aware of his danger, but he had

resolved to find out if all the Indians were going, or if more were still expected.

He had no difficulty in getting there undetected. The Indians had departed when he arrived, and a broad, plain trail was visible, pointing south, to the outer exit of the little valley, where it struck into the prairie.

Nothing was left in the lately populous valley, but the ashes of smoldering fires, and a few beef-bones, over which the coyotes were snarling.

The hunter's approach frightened the cowardly brutes, who slunked away into the woods, and Mart boldly followed the trail of the Indians. The scout had made up his mind to regain possession of the friends he had twice lost, at any hazard; and he was gratified to find that his horse was fresh, sturdy and strong; able to make a hundred-mile march, if need be.

He rode to the end of the valley, and scanned the plain in front of him with close attention. The remnant of the Apaches from the valley, thirty or forty in number, were galloping over the prairie toward the distant line of the Casas Grande river, and Mart could see, in the plain beyond, three moving specks, followed at a considerable interval by a long line of horsemen, which he knew at once to be his three friends, followed by Cortina's confederates.

The scout sat silently reflecting for some time. Then as if he had taken his resolution, he rode down into the prairie and was soon lost to view among the rolling swells, in the midst of the long grass that covered the valley of Casas Grandes.

CHAPTER XV.

RUN TO EARTH.

The young moon, about half-full, hung in the summit of the dark-blue sky, when the sun set; and the dusky crimson of the west had given place to a dull, amber brown, within ten minutes of the short twilight.

At the moment when the last flush was fading away, three figures on horseback, followed by a dog, stole out of the cover of a thick grove that lined the eastern bank of the Casas Grande river, and moved off at a walk back to the northward.

The most remarkable fact about these three equestrians was, that they moved in perfect silence. There was no apparent hoof-beat on the soft turf, and the horses moved like ghosts.

On the opposite side of the river was a small party of horsemen who appeared to be watching the ford of the river. **They were all Mexicans.**

The three silent fugitives were of course our three friends; the others, the remnant of Corina's band. Just before sunset a large party had started off down the river to search for a better ford, and Randolph had deemed it wise to try to steal back, running the gantlet, if necessary, of any small parties, before the main body should come back.

Their silent progress was easily explained. Around each horse's hoofs were fastened pads of dry grass, secured with strips of blanket torn from the saddle-blankets.

For some time after leaving the river, the fugitives rode at a walk, under shelter of the thick belts of timber that shaded the banks, till an open stretch of prairie appeared before them, with no cover for at least a mile. Here the river ran black and slow, between low black banks of mud, that looked **as if they were easy to climb.**

"Not at all," said Randolph, in answer to a suggestion of this danger from the General. "The water's over ten feet deep there, and no horse alive could scramble out after he was in it." "The nearest ford is beyond that cover," and he pointed to a dark line of timber ahead, whence the white line of lightning, faintly gleaming, indicated a mass of ruins **as in existence.**

Randolph and the rest pulled up in silence here. The Virginian dismounted, and unfastened the pads from the feet of the horses.

"We have gained a good start," he said. "Now we shall need the best speed we have, and the pads are impracticable at any great pace. **Forward!**"

He sprang on his horse, and galloped forward with the

others, as he spoke. In a few minutes after they had taken the open prairie, they were apprised, by a yell from the ford below, that they were seen and followed; and then away they went toward the ruins at full speed.

As they went they looked back to the western bank, but the land on that side was bare and empty. The guerrillas had crossed the stream behind them, and were coming up on the same bank as themselves.

"Good for our side," said Randolph, as they galloped along. "They think we're heading for the sierra, and they've lost time which they can never regain. The upper forde is easier than the lower one. Come on."

In a very few minutes they were so near to the ruins that they could distinguish them plainly in the moonlight, and when they rode into the shallow ford above, their pursuers were far in the rear.

"Safe at last, and now for home!" cried Randolph, as they emerged on the opposite side in the open prairie, and beheld it quite clear of foes. "I knew we should fool them, when we saw them go for the lower ford. Now we have only about ten miles to go in a straight line, to bring us to the mouth of—**HALT!**"

As he uttered the last words, he pulled up his horse on its haunches, with startling suddenness, and stiffened into an attitude of intense watchfulness. Old Jeff uttered a low growl. General Armistead peered eagerly into the doubtful moonlight, but could see nothing suspicious on the bare, slightly undulating prairie. But Randolph was a man of sight uncommonly keen; and practiced, moreover, in the country in which he then was; and old Jeff's growl had set him to looking.

"I saw it, too," whispered Lily Armistead, unslinging her rifle with the coolness of an old soldier. "It was a lance, coming in Hal."

Randolph made no answer. His keen glance roved rapidly over the prairie, and he looked back to where the little band of pursuers was rapidly coming up, on the farther bank.

"General Armistead," said the young man, in a low voice. "We are beset. The guerrillas went up the river, not down. They are determined to take us, if only for revenge. Now listen, and be sure to follow my advice. Our enemies are

over that swell between us and home. More are behind us. There's only one way to escape. We must run the gantlet of the lasses. You saw how I escaped to-day. Do as I did. Hold up your bridle and rifle, and throw off the noose before it has time to settle. If any thing happens to me ride for the mountains. Mart Bradford will get you out of the scrape. I'll engage their attention. You ride straight for that rock you see yonder."

He pointed to a tall, needle-shaped peak, that was a conspicuous object in the sierra they had left in the morning, and the last hurried directions were scarcely out of his mouth, when the pursuers on the opposite bank began to fire as they came within shot.

It seemed to be the signal for the others to charge.

The next moment a mob of horsemen came down over the top of a knoll about half a mile off, directly between them and the valley they wished to reach.

"Follow me!" shouted the Virginian; and the three made a simultaneous dart for the only way of escape left open. As they went, Randolph drew his knife, after handing his rifle to General Armistead, giving his directions as they galloped along.

The decisive movement approached.

In another minute they would cross the track of the extreme left of their pursuers, and would be within lasso distance.

Already the last, ineffective shots of Indians and guerrillas were whistling around them, and Randolph expected every moment that some bullet, better aimed than its predecessors, would hit one of the horses.

At last they shot past at full speed, the Virginian on the right, nearest the Mexicans. There was a confusion of shots and screams, a haze of flying lasses in the air, and the next minute they were past the danger and heading for the mountains in a direction that promised to take them far to the south of the coveted valley.

In the doubtful light the Mexican lasses had fallen short, and the three fugitives rapidly increased their distance.

As they went, Randolph looked back, and beheld the whole force of the guerrillas and Indians following after, their right

elging in constantly toward the mountains, as if to cut them off from the valley.

For the first time the young man began to feel apprehensive, as he marked the relentless character of the pursuit. The Indians appeared to have given up their risk for the pleasure of vengeance on those who had defied them.

But there was no time to give much thought on the subject, when their horses were straining every nerve to distance the mustangs.

Every leap took them more and more out of danger, as the moon sunk lower and lower in the sky. The shots became less frequent, the yells fainter; while the thunder of hoofs deadened into a distant rumble.

Lily had not said a word all the time. The little girl had ridden steadily, but had not fired a shot as she passed.

Her horse was a few feet ahead of her father's, and they had already put nearly a quarter of a mile between them and the enemy, when Randolph noticed that the General's horse was gradually dropping to the rear of the three.

He saw Armistead spurring hard, but the animal seemed to be unable to do any better, and for the first time the truth flashed on the young man's mind.

The horse was hit hard by some stray bullet.

He restrained his own animal to the other's pace, and Armistead confirmed his suspicions with the calmness of desperation.

Lily was some way ahead, and had noticed nothing yet, except that her father and Harry Randolph had fallen a back a little stretch.

The General, with the calmness of a brave man, realized all his peril, and how *some one* must be sacrificed.

"Harry Randolph," he said, "my horse is falling. He's wounded some where. You must leave me, and take care of Lily."

"Take my horse, General," said the young man, quickly. "We are close to the woods now. I'll slip in, before your drops, and I shall be safe. Come. Quick."

"Not so," said Armistead sternly. "Do as I tell you. Secure Lily's safety, and I'll try my chance in the woods. Young man, no words. What could I do with that girl in

the mountains? You know the place; and you can save her. Do it. If you can, save me afterwards, but if I fall, I trust Lily to you, as her nearest relative. Take care of her. Quick? The horse is falling, and the Indians are coming."

As he spoke, he turned the animal's head for the timber at the foot of the mountain, now only a short distance off, and the wounded charger made the best of his way toward it.

Randolph hesitated no longer.

"I'll save you yet," he sung out, as the other parted from him; and then he spurred on his own horse to Lily's side.

He found the girl just pulling up, alarmed at the gap between her and her father.

"What's the matter?" cried Lily, hurriedly. "Where's papa? Where is he? I must go back for him."

Randolph's iron grip was on her bridal hand, before he said a word in answer. By a sudden jerk he twitched away the bridle from Lily, and had it over her horse's head in his own hands.

"Come along," he said, sternly. "Trust to me and all will be well. You can not stop. It will be death to all three of us. Your father's horse is wounded."

It was well for him that Lily could not stop her horse. She uttered a shrill scream of anger, crying:

"Let me go to papa! Let me go with him. I will not stay!"

But Randolph's will was the stronger, and he would not let her stop. By a quick, dexterous motion he stripped the bridle from the head of Firefly, as Lily, leaning forward, tried to grasp at the reins; and the animal stretched away alongside, at a speed that prevented his rider's attempts to grasp at his nostrils, in the vain effort to check him.

Meanwhile, the pursuit behind had slackened considerably. The Indians and guerrillas, catching sight of the General heading for the woods, swerved around after the more certain prize.

As they entered the wood, Randolph saw the General plunge forward, his horse dropping close to the edge.

There was a succession of red flashes from the pursuers, answered by another from the woods; and then the Virginian was too much occupied with his own affairs to attend further.

Lily was alternately threatening, scolding, and imploring him, as she was carried along, to let her go back and die with her father.

Randolph made no answer, till they were some distance away, and only followed by a single pursuer, an Indian, who kept at a wary distance, and did not press them. Then he slackened his pace to a canter, Firefly following his example, and addressed his cousin.

"Lily" he said, gravely, "one of us three had to be sacrificed, and your father took the matter into his own hands. He would not take my horse, and told me to save you. I'm going to put you safe, first, and then go back for him. Do you understand?"

"But suppose he's killed," said Lily, tearfully. "Oh, Harry! How shall we ever forgive ourselves if he is?"

"He will not be killed," said Randolph, firmly. "Mock and I will prevent it."

"How?" asked the girl, amazed.

"You shall see," answered her cousin, mysteriously.

He quickened his pace again as he spoke, and scanned the woods and mountains, now close on his right, as if he was searching for some familiar landmark.

At this minute, a tremendous yelling arose from the main body of the pursuers behind, and Lily looked back.

There was a dense, dark mass of horsemen close to the edge of the woods, and as Lily looked, a fresh succession of spitting red flashes from the mass, followed by the rattle of firearms, announced that they were shooting volleys into the woods. But the shots were answered from the wood itself, *and in two quarters.*

It needed no intuition to realize that Mart Bradford was in all probability in the woods, helping the General.

"Oh! cousin Hal!" pleaded Lily, piteously. "Do let me go back and have just one shot. Poor papa! We may draw them off from him, you know."

"Will you promise to obey my orders, then?" asked Randolph, in a hesitating tone, as he drew up. "We may do a great deal of good in that way, but I fear you will hold on too long. Remember that your father trusted you to my care."

"Indeed, cousin Hal, I'll be good," pleaded Lily, earnestly. "Only let me try a few shots at them, and then we'll run as soon as you like."

"Agreed," said Randolph. "We are nearer home than you think."

He put the bridle back over Firefly's head as he spoke, and handed the reins to Lily.

"Remember, coz," he said, "that I have no rifle. I lent mine to your father."

"All right," said Lily, gayly. "I shall have to do double work. That's all. Here goes."

She turned her horse deliberately toward the Indian who was hovering behind them, seemingly uncertain whether to advance or retreat; and took a long and careful aim at the dark figure.

As the rifle cracked, the Indian uttered a taunting yell, and turned his horse to gallop away, and Lily shook her little fist at him.

"Now I'll shoot an Indian to night," cried the girl, angrily, "if I have to go into the middle of them to do it."

And before Randolph could stop her, she was galloping, single handed, toward the Indians, leading as she went. Randolph dug in the spurs and shot up alongside, checking her very unceremoniously.

"Your promise, Lily," he said, sternly. "Is this the way you keep it? For shame! Come back!"

But before he could catch her, she was within gun-shot of the dark body of Indians.

Without replying to his query, Lily leveled her little rifle, and fired right into the midst of them. A yell announced that this time she had succeeded, and a scattered volley was followed by a general charge.

"That's all I wanted," quoth little Lily, laughing; as she turned her horse to flee with Randolph. "Now, cousin Hal, where's your cave, or wherever you want to go? I want to see it."

Randolph galloped along in silence for some time, his hand on Lily's bridle, while he scanned the woods to his right. Suddenly a broad gap opened in those woods; and the lofty gray rocks of the mountain appeared to rise up perpendicu-

larly, at the end of a short glen, formed by two spurs of the great mountain, on whose side lay the hidden cave.

The bases of both spurs were covered with woods; but the glen appeared to be the dry open bed of a torrent, as far as could be seen. A deep shadow from the moon covered half of it, and, at the end, Lily could see a great black gap in the mountain side, evidently the mouth of another cave of some sort.

Into this short glen rode Randolph without any hesitation; and at the sight the Indians behind uttered a loud yell of triumph and came tearing down, to cut off a corner, and intercept his retreat.

They thought they had him and Lily cornered at last.

Lily herself began to feel some alarm as the Indians drew nearer and nearer; and still Randolph kept on at an easy canter.

It seemed as if he wanted them to follow him up the glen, and into the cavern.

At all events they did so, yelling furiously, and firing random shots into the darkness at the end of the glen.

The two fugitives quickened their pace, and galloped on, till they stood in the mouth of an enormous cave, the opening at least sixty feet high, the width about the same. Soft sand crunched under their horses' feet, as Randolph turned round, and drew two revolvers from his holsters.

"Now Lily," he said, in a low tone. "Do your best shooting, and we're safe."

For nearly a minute, the quick flashes and report of the pistols from the two continued, the red light gleaming for an instant, and revealing glimpses of a vast natural tunnel, that seemed to penetrate into the heart of the mountain to a great distance. Old Jeff bayed loudly with excitement.

The mob of pursuers, chiefly Indians, who came rushing on heedlessly, checked by the first shots, huddled together, firing at random.

Exposed to view as they were, against the bright background of sky, they offered a fair mark to the two cousins, who fired out of the dark cavern in comparative security. In a dozen shots, more than half took effect, and the pursuers gave way in a mass, and fell back in a hurry.

In another moment Randolph had seized Lily's bridle.

"Come!" he said, in a low tone. "It is time we were going."

And as he spoke he turned both horses, and moved into the caverns natural tunnel at a walk.

Taking his horse by the bridle he conducted Lily through a long, winding cavern, growing narrower and narrower, till the sound of dripping waters announced that a change was coming.

Randolph halted and cried out:

"Mack! Montezuma! To our help, *cigique*."

A light shone down on them from the roof of the cave, and the face of Montezuma appeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TOILS.

WHEN General Armistead leaped for the woods, he had very little hope of doing any thing, beyond selling his life dearly. His horse was falling fast, and finally stumbled and fell, with a low groan, when the enemy was within two hundred yards, and his rider not quite in the woods.

But thanks to good luck, the General fell clear of his horse, picked up himself and rifle, and was into cover before any one could come up.

Once down, he crept through between the trees for a little distance, till he heard the enemy coming, when he slipped behind a trunk, and lay quiet; his heart beating hard against his ribs.

The Indians came yelling through the woods, on foot, in great numbers; and Armistead, resting his borrowed rifle against the projecting root of a tree, sighted the foremost and dropped him. What was his surprise, when, not twenty feet to his left, came a flash, and he saw a second Indian fall, while the well-known voice of Matt Bradford yelled out:

"Hooray for Texas! Give 'em blazes, Gin'ral! That's what's the matter!"

The General was wonderfully inspired. He leaped up,

and used the last three shots in his revolver with fatal effect on his pursuers, who were close to him, and relieved against the light, while the rapid cracks of Mart's revolver showed that the hunter was equally well employed.

But two men, however brave, can not do much against a hundred. Mart and the General drove back their assailants, only to find themselves overwhelmed with fresh hordes, who were creeping down on either flank, and gradually surrounding them.

"One comfort, they can't get behind us, Mart," said the old soldier, as he sat down with his back against the rock, sheltered in front by a huge tree. "You watch the right, and I'll try the left. We can keep them at bay till morning."

For some time their assailants remained silent, apparently respecting the strength of the two men's position. Now that they fired no longer, however, a rustling and trampling in the leaves commenced, which showed that some one was coming. Then there was a tramp of horses in the outer woods, followed by considerable shouting of orders from one side to the other.

"It is Cortina," said the General; "I know his voice."

The trampling of leaves came closer and closer now, but nothing was visible. Their assailants, wherever they were, had sheltered themselves behind trees, and were creeping forward with great caution. The General waited, his rifle ready to his hand, and straining his eyes through the darkness.

He had only one shot to depend on, if a rush came now, for his revolver was empty, and he had no more cartridges.

Suddenly, from the top of the rocks over their heads, a voice—the voice of Cortina, sharp and menacing—shouted:

"Now!"

Instantly a crowd of dark figures leaped up in a circle all round the besieged men, with a tremendous shout, and the General fired into their midst.

No sooner had he done so than something fell on him from above, that he knew only too well.

It was the noose of a lasso!

With a desperate effort, the General managed to throw it off, the easier that it had been unskillfully aimed in the darkness, falling on the barrel of his piece.

But he had no time for more.

In another moment he was set upon by a horde of yelling devils, who had not yet fired a shot, he noticed; struck down to the earth, and pinioned by a dozen hands.

But where was Mart Bradford all this time?

The scout, without firing, bounded forward the instant his enemies showed themselves, dashed the barrel of his piece in one man's face, knocking him over, and bounded through the line, into the woods outside, unhurt.

Poor General Armistead, bruised, bound, and a prisoner, heard the falling tattoo of the pursuit, and wondered to himself if Mart should escape. There was plenty of yelling and shooting, but as the scout was not brought back, he concluded that he must have escaped.

At last the chief, haughty, handsome and cruel-looking, stalked up to the poor General as he lay there.

"*Señor General,*" he said, sneeringly; "you gave us a long chase to catch you, it seems; but, the saints be praised! our chase has not been in vain; for we have bagged all the birds at once—both you and the brave hunter, and the charming daughter. What say you, *señor*? Is it easy to fool Cortina?"

The General made no answer. He was steeling himself to meet the death which he felt was inevitable, with fortitude.

Cortina looked at him and laughed again.

"And so you thought that you were safe this morning, *señor*?" he resumed. "You and your fair daughter, and that strange young man who killed me well, didn't you? If you had but been wise enough to go to Chihuahua, you might have been safe. Who knows? The country is roused, down there; and the cursed Austrian has sent a whole brigade of troops out after us. So you see we turned back, *señor*. Was it not strange, your bad luck? Not so strange as mine, however. I am cut out of my expedition to the south, and therefore I am going to the north now. What say you, General? Will you not accompany us to Brownsville, and be revenged on the Yankee soldiers? If you will guide us you shall have your life. I promise you that."

"No," said Armistead, resolutely, as the guerrilla paused,

and looked in his face with some anxiety. "I told you once before that the word of a gentleman can not be broken."

Cortina frowned fearfully. He bit his lip and stood considering, and as he did so, Armistead's courage rose. He began to realize the reason why the guerrilla had not killed him at first. It was because he needed him for a guide.

Just then four Indians appeared, carrying with them the insensible body of Mart Bradford, which they laid down at the other side of the fire.

"You see, señor," sneered Cortina, "he tried to escape, and he was brought down by a shot from this hand. Here, one of you," he continued, turning to his followers, "*sear that man's leg!*"

A great, hulking brute of a guerrilla drew his knife and ripped open the leggings of the unconscious hunter, revealing a deep, red hole in the thigh, from which the blood slowly oozed. With the deliberation and coolness of a professed surgeon he stooped over the fire and pulled out therefrom a flaming brand, which he deliberately thrust right into the deep, crimson hole, where it expired with a sickening sizzle.

Horrible as was the method it was efficacious. The seared veins closed up as if by magic, and the blood ceased to flow.

"What *are* your terms, General?" asked Armistead, desperately. His fortitude was shaken by the spectacle of suffering in his faithful follower, and he began to devise plans for deceiving the other, the honest soldier who had never equivocated till that hour.

"My terms *to-night*," said the guerrilla, with a sneer, "are very simple. You are to guide me all over Texas on this raid, and to make cannon for us in the mountains afterward. That is all I want to-night. Accept the terms, and you are free, on parole. I give you till morning to consider."

And the guerrilla turned away and sought his blanket for a few hours' repose, an example soon followed by the others.

Armistead and Mart Bradford were left alone in the midst of a circle of recumbent guerrillas and savages, who were all by this time sleeping peacefully, except the guards.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CATARACT.

WITH the first peep of dawn the raiders were astir, and hastily devouring their breakfast. Cortina stalked about, giving orders of various kinds, especially to accumulate plenty of wood and brush, to "smoke the rats out of their holes," as he said.

As he finished his meal a man rode in through the forest who saluted the guerrilla and delivered some message to him in a low tone. Cortina listened attentively, and asked aloud:

"How far in have you been?"

"As far as we dared without lights," replied the man. "It is quite empty as far as we went, and pitch dark."

"They are in the end, then," said Cortina, rubbing his hands. "So much the better! We can take them alive, and have our rest in the open air. To horse, men!"

The bugle which the guerrillas used in imitation of more regular troops here sounded, and the whole troop mounted and got under way as soon as possible.

"Leave the wounded man there, till we come back," said the chief, pointing to Mat Br. if r. "One man can watch him, and will make our bed here." Señor General, do not forget to tie up your horse. You must remember that you have tried to run away before this."

And the General with his hands bound behind him, was placed on a horse which whose belly his legs were tied by one of the men. As the fellow performed the operation, the General felt him give a slight tug to his foot to attract his attention. Looking down he saw that it was one of his former companions, the good doctor. Instantly the thought occurred to him that the man was helping him. How, he asked himself, when he tried to move his wrists. They were so firmly fastened that he felt that it was quite practicable for him to pull them out of the bonds whenever he chose, and he determined to do so, and to free his ankles, at the very first opportunity.

Cortina rode down the slope of ground through the woods, into the prairie outside, which he skirted till he came to the entrance of the glen and cavern down which the two fugitive cousins had ridden the night before.

Several horsemen, mostly Indians, were standing in the mouth of the cavern holding great torches in their hands.

A huge fire blazed just before the cave mouth, lighting it up with a lurid glare.

Cortina smiled, and asked :

"What think you, Señor General? Can we bring out a man and a girl from this cave? Look around you, and see if we have force enough."

The General looked around, and beheld the whole mob of confederated thieves and Indians, at least a thousand in number, filling up the whole glen and the mouth of the cavern. He trembled as he reflected on the probable fate of his daughter, who had been tracked to this cave, and he could say nothing.

"Forward!" cried the guerrilla chief, striking into a canter, and the whole party rode into the cavern.

As they had supposed from the outside, it narrowed with a tunnel of not more than twenty feet broad and high, the floor strewn with soft white sand, on which the tracks of two horses and a dog were plainly visible in the lurid torchlight.

In this manner they advanced for a considerable distance into the cavern. But still there was no sign of the fugitives; only the tracks of the two horses and the dog as plain as ever.

At last the same dropping of water became audible, which Lily had been startled at the night before. Cortina, who was in the advance still, heard the sound and quickened his pace.

The instant the guerrilla quickened his pace, General Arrieta slipped the bonds off his hands and feet, and prepared for a last struggle in defense of his daughter, whom he expected to see in another moment.

The roof of the tunnel gradually rose now, and the dripping of water became plainly audible. Presently the passage ended, and came out in the middle of a huge, dome-shaped cavern, of which the walls were covered with bas-reliefs, while in the center rose a colossal seated statue, strongly resembling the Egyptian monoliths.

There seemed to be no farther outlet from the cave, this being the last of it. The walls were covered with solemn bas-reliefs, all round, except in one place.

The air was quite pure, and the cause of the dripping of water became evident. From the upper part of the rock through certain unseen fissures, water was slowly dripping, drop by drop, into a little shallow pool in the floor, formed under that identical wall. It was the only place where any water seemed to be, for all the rest of the cavern was singularly dry.

But, like to every thing else, Cortina looked eagerly round for the fugitives. He ordered a strict search all round the sides of the cavern with lights, but in vain. The fugitives were not there.

The guerrillas began to look apprehensive, as the certainty dawned on them; and the same whispers as before circulated. The chief was only furious. He suspected that they were still hidden in some nook that they had passed by.

"Search the cave," he shouted. "Look into every corner. Put the prisoner in the center by the statue, so that we can see him. *He'll be creeping into some rat-hole next.*"

In obedience to the order, Miguel Gonzalez led the General's horse to the center of the great cave beside the sitting statue. The General's head, as he sat on horse-back, was but just even with the knees of the statue.

The guerrillas went all round the cavern, shouting noisily to keep up their courage, but the Indians were all very silent. They stood clustered together in a great mass of horsemen, for the immense size of the cave would have admitted a brigade. General Armistead was puzzled himself. Close to his feet were the tracks of two horses and a dog, which appeared to terminate suddenly, a few yards from the base of the great statue.

"They must have flown through the air, or been hoisted up," said the General, aloud, and as he said the words his eyes involuntarily rose up to the rocky ceiling of the huge cavern, which seemed over fifty feet above him.

What was it that made him start and flush as he looked?

It was the face of his own child, Lily Armistead, bright and beautiful as ever, looking down from a great square trap that seemed to have opened by magic.

He looked round. Every one else was busy searching the walls, never thinking of the ceiling.

Again the General looked up. There were two other faces looking down. One was Randolph, the other an Indian. He saw the Virginian make a silent signal with his hand, and then down came a long rope of plaited hide, dangling close to him. It was the work of a moment for Armistead to seize it and stand up on the back of his horse.

At this moment Gonzalez, who had been watching the rest, turned round, and uttered a yell of surprise. The General gave a leap and sprung into the statue's lap, and thence, with two long steps up to its shoulder and head.

To the superstitious Indians, who saw the apparent flight, but not the slender rope by which it was managed, the transaction was evidently supernatural.

"Shoot him," yelled Cortina, firing off both barrels of his gun in aimless haste; and a shower of bullets went skipping all over the roof of the cavern.

Armistead heard the whistle of the bullets, and felt that he was caught up by the rope, and hauled upward like a feather. In a moment more he was caught in his daughter's arms, and was looking down, hardly believing his eyes, on the dark cavern, full of rushing lights, clustering together at the base of the statue, while many of the guerrillas fired savagely and almost aimlessly up at the great trap-door.

"*Turn on the water, Metztuma!*" shouted Randolph, as a bullet hissed up close to his feet.

Then, leaning down, he bellowed through a long speaking trumpet some words in an unknown language.

General Armistead, hugging Lily to his breast, hardly knew if he was safe yet. He gazed down, as one in a dream, and saw Cortina gallop off to the mouth of the cavern waving his torch and yelling something or other, followed by a crowd of guerrillas and Indians. The mass of torches showed everything plainly below, even the faces of the robbers.

But the guerrillas, less superstitious, saw only the creeping prisoner and the open door overhead.

Then he heard a dull, thudding, crashing sound far below him, and the floor on which he stood trembled, although made of solid rock. The sound below swelled up in a min-

ute to a roar like the thunders of Niagara; and the astounded General beheld a black, glittering wall of water leap out over the floor of the great cave below, and sweep down on the bright torches so closely massed together at the entrance.

It was but for a moment that he beheld the blanched faces of the horror-stricken robbers. The next, there was a dull boom as of thunder, the rocks shook once more, and the lights were swallowed up in darkness, with a silence even more awful, as the yells of terror were smothered in one instant.

Then one dull, continued roar of waters, rushing into the cave below, and the splash that told how those same waters were mounting rapidly to where they were.

The General looked round, and beheld Randolph, with a lantern in his hand, gazing down on the black, gleaming flood below.

"Is there no danger, Harry?" he whispered. "Where does that water come from?"

"A hundred feet above us," was the quiet reply; "but we can get upstairs in time. Wait a— Ha! there she goes!"

There was a deep rumbling and gurgling far below them, as he spoke, and a succession of pulpitating shocks to the whole interior of the mountain, it seemed. Then the roaring was renewed louder than ever, and Randolph raised his lantern.

"General," he said, quietly, "your enemies are dead, and are now being swept out on their way to Chihuahua."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERY A MYSTERY NO MORE.

As their leader, Mrs. Bradford, lying wounded and alone under a tree, heard the tramp of horses; and the next moment Lily Armstrong galloped up, followed by her father, Randolph, and Mestanza, the latter bearing between their animals a comfortable horse-litter.

All the party were mounted on mustangs, with Indian trappings, and greeted Mart with enthusiasm.

"You poor, dear old Mart!" began Lily, jumping down to hug him heartily. "What a trouble I have given you all, to be sure, since I ran away only the day before yesterday! But never mind. Our troubles are all over now, and we'll be all rich and happy, and never come near the nasty old Mexico again."

Mart Bradford blushed up to the eyes to be kissed by "his young lady." The honor was highly appreciated.

"What's the muss, Miss Lily?" he asked, faintly. "I heard a great grumblin' and roarin' a while ago, as ef Old Nick had bruk loose, and my Greaser, he jest put, like as ef the old feller war a comin' for him, yellin' out suthin' 'bout Quetzalcoatl, or some o' them devils, and nary human bein' I see'd since."

"You shall hear all about it when we get you home, Mart," said Henry Randolph, kindly. "In the first place, you must be put into this litter."

And the four lifting carefully, the wounded man was put into the litter at the cost of a few groans.

"Look there," said Randolph, pointing to the plain below. "There's a river you never saw before, and you'll not see it much longer, either."

Mart peered over the side of the litter, and beheld a shallow stream, meandering over the prairie here and there, while a quantity of dark objects appeared to be carried on and left in the grass, half submerged, in its course.

"Do you know what those are?" pursued Randolph, pointing to the dark objects.

"They looks like dead hosses and men," said Mart, slowly; "but how come they thar'?"

"You remember the lake you came on by surprise," said the Virginian, as he walked beside the litter, the horses going at a slow pace.

"I do," said Mart. "What on it?"

"It's dry now," said Randolph, quietly. "We let it out by the old flood-gates, and drowned Cortina and all his band."

"Not Cortina," said Mart, decidedly. "I see'd that thar' identical cuss a streakin' it off over the perarrer not half a hour ago."

"Are you sure?" asked Randolph, eagerly.

"Sartin," said Mart; "I'd know him among a thousan'."

"Then the devil has saved his own," said Randolph. "He wasn't born to be drowned. The bodies of the rest must have choked up the pipe or tunnel as it were, just about long enough for him to get off alone. Well, one comfort, his teeth are pulled."

"Well, let him go," said Lily; "we are over our troubles now, and besides, we are rich—"

"How's that?" interrupted Mart, surprised. "Whose treasures hev we been a-robbin' Miss Lily, or hev ye found a 'placer'?"

"Mock shall tell you about it," said Randolph. "It is his privilege, for he owns the treasure by right, and gives it to us, because he's a prince."

And accordingly, some hours after, Mock told them all the story, standing on the broad steps of basalt that had once been flush with the waters of the Hidden Lake.

But the Hidden Lake was no longer there.

In its stead was a deep, irregular, rocky hollow, with little springs slowly trickling over picturesque masses of wet rock, down to a huge, open doorway far below where a sluice-gate of solid rock stood open, and allowed a little stream to trickle over into the cavern of death, where the guerrillas had perished like rats drowned in their holes. But down among the rocks, lying in every hollow, were piles of gold and silver plate of the most elaborate character, and the broad, square rock of basalt proved to be only the top of a broad flight of steps that led down nearly two hundred feet to the bottom of the well-like hollow.

"It is the crater of an extinct volcano," said General Armistead.

"Hush!" said Lily, softly. "Listen to Mock."

The old Indian waved his hand with princely grace, and addressed Mart Bradford, who had been brought there to see the wonders of the Hidden Lake.

"Many winters ago," he began, "when Quetzalcoatl was the God of the Aztec, and the Aztec was lord of the earth, the grandfather of the great Moctezuma built him a palace here as you see it. In those days there was no gate to shut

off the waters of the streams below, and they ran out of the black cave in a little stream. But the prince was a great prince, and he sent for workmen by the ten thousand and made them set up his statue at the end of the black cave, and carve beautiful pictures on the walls. And then he had the gate constructed below, whereby he could stop the waters and cause a deep lake to be made. And he made him a palace up here among the caves as you have seen, and cut chambers in the rock, and made him a gate opening onto the Lost Road such as you have seen. And here he collected all his treasures of silver and of gold, and hid them in the cave.

"Now at last he died, and in due time Moctezuma came to the throne; and in his days came the yellow-haired children of the sun from beyond the great waters, and made war on Moctezuma, and took him prisoner, and put him to ransom for great treasure.

"Then sent Moctezuma to all parts of the land of Anahuac, and sent for all his treasures to be gathered together here in this place, that he might give them to the Spaniards. But the Spaniards had no patience, and they slew Moctezuma.

"Then the priests were very wroth, and with one accord they closed the gates, and threw all the treasures into the lake, while they themselves shut up the palace and fled, for the vessels were sacred.

"And I alone, the last of Moctezuma's race, would have let the secret die with me but for one thing. My young brother here saved the poor Indian cacique from the disgrace of blows, when he knew not who I was. I have made him my heir, for what need I of all these riches? Let him wed the little daughter of the sun, and all will be well. My brother of the gray head will consent."

As he spoke, the cacique joined the hands of Randolph and Lily, and General Armistead said, with a choking voice:

"Harry Randolph, you deserve her. God bless you both. And so say all of us."

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